

The
Use of Penitence

By Edward T. Churton, D.D.

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BY

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“No pleading of CHRIST's love, of His sacrifice, can ever be unavailing. Even the single petition of this prayer, ‘Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us,’ has its own promise of renewed reconciliation: how much more the continued acts of penitence and the Ministry of His Priesthood, to which He hath said, ‘Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them?’” (From a Sermon of Canon T. T. Carter, *The Cleansing of Christ.*)

TO THE MISSIONARIES OF THE ENGLISH CHURCH,
BISHOPS AND PRIESTS,
ZEALOUS LAYMEN AND FAITHFUL WOMEN,
AT HOME AND ABROAD,
WHO BRING TO EVERY PLACE THE GOSPEL OF OUR REDEMPTION,
AND OF SALVATION THROUGH THE MOST HOLY NAME;
PRAYING THAT THEIR HARVEST MAY BE FULL AND PLENTEOUS HERE;
THAT HEREAFTER THEIR SOULS MAY FIND MERCY OF THE LORD
IN THAT DAY.

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PREFACE.

PENITENCE is here considered from the standpoint of an old missionary, who believes that "repentance and remission of sins" are still necessary to be "preached in CHRIST'S Name unto all the nations;" and who is unable to find himself in complete accord with either the vigorous optimism, or the philosophic calm,¹ by which various minds are attracted at the present time. I believe—because it would be impossible for me at this date not to believe—that GOD alone is supremely just, that man's moral choice is free, and that his ultimate triumph over evil is secured to him by faith and repentance. But I do not think that he can prevail without a conflict, nor that his victory can be attained except through leaning always on Divine grace.

Farther, unless we are to be tossed all our lives on a wide sea of doubt, I consider that we require sacramental assurance of GOD'S reception of us into His grace and favour. "GOD is in heaven, we upon earth:" the meeting-point is where He comes to us in a mystery, renewing and applying that love which "loosed us from our sins by His Blood."²

The view herein taken, coming as it does from out of the

¹ Compare S. Augustine (*Conf.* vii. 27): "Non habent illæ paginæ [Platonicorum] lacrymas confessionis, sacrificium Tuum, spiritum contritulum, cor contritum et humiliatum." Our highest life in this militant Church is the life of union through penitence with JESUS crucified: not that impassive θεωρία to which philosophers hoped to attain through γνῶσις.

² Rev. i. 5. (R.V.). By adopting the reading λύσαντι, the Revisers have introduced here the idea of CHRIST'S atonement being our absolution. Some will regret the disappearance of more familiar words:—"Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own Blood," etc. But if λύσαντι is to stand, we have an equally important doctrine stated.

retirement of a very quiet life, may be thought to have missed the more promising signs of a progress in which the best and bravest of one's contemporaries are strongly interested. In that case, I would suggest that the first chapter (of which the drift is plainly intimated by the opening sentence) may conveniently be omitted without injury to what comes after. The most useful chapters will be the practical ones, as the ninth, tenth, and eleventh. On matters ethical and social, or even spiritual and ascetic, a long pastoral experience may entitle one to a hearing; whereas whenever a question has to be decided by historical research, I must simply bow to higher authority—*jurans in verba magistri*. Then, the repetition of facts for the most part well-known, or opinions long ago established, will, I fear, be found tedious, though there seemed no way to avoid it.

The chapters are loosely strung together; the intention being that each should, as far as possible, have a separate consistency of its own.¹

The book is not offered as a collection of authorities for Confession, nor to attack any methods of Conversion that are Christian. If controversial at all, it is aimed at those who refuse repentance in any shape. The author hopes that very much of what it contains will be acceptable to Evangelicals, and to those (of whatever school) who know far better than himself, what are the yearnings of devout souls after GOD, and the righteousness which is by faith.

I consider that "the wisdom of the Church of England" is nowhere more conspicuous than in the sober but firm line which the Prayer Book takes on penitence; and this in spite of some obscurity of language.

There are, however, many sincere Christians who have never felt the need of being loosed from the bondage of evil habits. By them, the daily Absolutions of the Prayer Book are received as benedictions, or reassuring tokens from an all-merciful FATHER, whom they love, and whose love towards themselves they could not bear to lose. But the following pages have been written by one whose work had been among the fallen or

¹ I venture to recommend a brief study of the Contents, before beginning the book.

ignorant ; and its motive will be found in the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. And he is convinced that a certain plainness of speech is essential, yes ! and a fearlessness of practice agreeable to the words spoken, if the Church is to continue her Christmas greeting of "peace and goodwill" to all—to all who are objects of the Divine goodwill in CHRIST JESUS our Saviour.

I have followed the fashion by quoting generally from the Revised Version ; although I think that for a book like this, mainly practical and hortatory, the best language is whatever is most familiar : on which account I should have myself preferred "the Bible as appointed to be read in churches."



CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I. SIN AND REPENTANCE; THE AVERSION OF THE VIRTUOUS	PAGE I
---	-----------

Modern unconsciousness of sin—Silence of society with regard to sin—Smoothness of modern existence—Optimistic tranquility of conscience—Reticence even with inward earnestness—Study of the Bible confined to its literature—Theology superseded by speculative philosophy—Preaching to amuse, not convert—Secularity of modern parochial work—Reform that is not Christian—Disappointment of efforts is more bitter, when the shield of faith is lacking—Other ventures in reform, professedly Christian, but without the note of penitence—Enthusiasm for CHRIST's person as the noblest type of humanity—Desire to be associated with CHRIST in practical benevolence—Preconceptions of goodness, apart from the Cross—Our LORD opposed to the common human standards—CHRIST either takes away sins or judges them—He is separate from sinners—Penitential teaching however is supposed to be obsolete—The Sacred Passion taken for a mere example of unselfishness—But CHRIST Himself declared His life a ransom for many—The joy of the penitent—Good tidings of forgiveness cause great joy of heart—The highest good is attainable through repentance—Sunshine of GOD's love—Weakness which is strong—Poverty which makes many rich—The sinner's weak love cries for mercy to the love which is eternal and Divine.

CHAPTER II. CAUSES OF DIVIDED FEELING WITHIN THE CHURCH	28
---	----

The argument from disappointment will not be widely convincing—Loyal churchmen of whatever school, consider sin in its just and merciful relation to CHRIST crucified—Yet some who hold the remission of sins have a distaste for the Church's system of penitence—They think a priest's intervention either superfluous, or derogatory to GOD's free mercy in CHRIST—Jealousies of Papal assumption have indeed ceased to be felt—Hostility of sects is met by loyalty to the Prayer Book—Enormous wealth of the rich is not used generally against pastoral influence—But "good Low-churchmen" are averse to sacramental penitence—Language of Prayer Book sometimes obscure—Priests accused of disturbing peace of families—"A barrier between the soul and its Saviour"—Such objections to be met with respectful sympathy—Direct personal intercourse with GOD most essential—Yet Evangelicals are wrong in rejecting *penitentia*—Repentance not to be hurried over—To do so may suit the pride of the Anglo-Saxon race, but not the private need of humble and contrite souls—All earnest Christians should make a common stand against the prevailing indifference—Let their ground of agreement be the Holy Scriptures.

CHAPTER III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF PENITENCE, BEFORE AND AFTER CHRIST - - - - - 44

Preliminary Note, on the scope of the chapter.

Men have ever been moved by conscience to sorrow for wrong-doing — Greater or less, according to their apprehension of GOD ; but such sorrow is in some degree common to all men, simple or learned — With this was joined the fear of sin's punishment by death — Still, hope remained in GOD, who "hated nothing that He had made" — Resort to sacrifice, the vicarious offering of life for life — GOD's wrath appeased, and length of days granted to those who thus sought His favour — As education advanced, sacrifices of brute beasts failed to satisfy man's moral cravings — Nor could the voluntary self-immolation of a hero avail, while the motive of contrition was absent — Nor contrite prayer itself avail to undo the past — The soul's yearnings satisfied at last through the sacrifice of CHRIST — "GOD can die for GOD, and for that which He loves" — Our LORD's penitence vicarious rather than personal — Redemption through His Blood leads the Christian on to new life in Him — Propitiatory side to the sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist — This however is chiefly the Feast of our reconciliation, and our *sacrificium laudis* — Its jubilant tone requires previous exercises of penitence, necessary now as from the beginning — The HOLY SPIRIT, given to us as members of the risen CHRIST, enables us to search and try our hearts.

CHAPTER IV. THE DUTY OF CONFESSION, FROM HOLY SCRIPTURE - - - - - 64

First-formed notions of repentance postulate only conviction of sin and amendment — But outward proof of sincerity is required by the community — also, outward expression of sorrow before GOD — also, plain language in owning faults, for one's own sake, and for truth and honesty — For these reasons, confession is most important — In the Old Testament, confession is a public acknowledgment of good or evil — *confessio aut laudantis aut penitentis* — but always open and audible — practised by the Jewish Church under the Law of Moses, though the instances are not many — continued up to and in the national crisis at the mission of the Forerunner — Most confessions were made for the people by a priest or prophet, yet sometimes by individuals for themselves, with remarkable sorrow and humbling of self — Reparation to the community by confession was approved by our LORD — In the New Testament, public confession is sanctioned by S. Paul, S. James, and S. John — no offence in this, while Christians' intercourse was simple and unconstrained — however, not often mentioned while the Pentecostal joy was fresh — Public confession the instinct of a youthful people — with better civil government, would be less frequenting of the Church's *forum* — publicity not essential to confession — The private or auricular method has three advantages, in (1) its connection with absolution, (2) its usefulness in facilitating truth of speech, (3) the opportunities it affords for ghostly counsel and advice.

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTERS V. AND VI. ON THE PRIMITIVE ECCLESIASTICAL METHODS OF REPENTANCE - - - - - 81

Primitive penance is not a subject of primary importance to missionary clergy — yet the chief landmarks should be briefly noted — also the large resemblance between ancient rules and those of the Prayer Book — Facts of early Church history are interpreted differently by Protestants and Roman Catholics — Practice of the English Church should be conformed,

as its authorised language is already, to principles laid down by great Fathers — Neither the mediæval period, nor that since the Reformation, are included in this survey; but there is no doubt that sacramental confession has been practised in the English Church throughout the centuries.

CHAPTER V. HEARERS OF CONFESSIONS, AND SPIRITUAL GUIDES - 88

Not much is known about confessions, or those who heard them, during the first two centuries — When records become more explicit, they give prominence to ecclesiastical punishments — at first, three crying sins were excluded from discipline, as beyond the Church's power to correct — these were reckoned public scandals, besides the offence to GOD — but by degrees these were admitted to *exomologesis*, and included among mortal sins remissible through public penance — the hearers were then the faithful assembled — before long, increasing gentleness allowed substitution of private confession, except for notorious crimes — corresponding to this, increased diligence in self-examination — intellectual sins as well as sensual — Early mention of private confessors, by Sozomen and Origen — qualifications of such, from S. Basil and S. Ambrose — seal of confession already observed — We hear also of pious people seeking ghostly advice without confession — for daily faults, the Fathers enjoin use of LORD'S Prayer with almsgiving — Here our modern use differs, confession being much resorted to for venial sins — reasons why this may be best at the present time, owing to special difficulties in our modern life, as pressure of infidelity, and mischief arising from the opposite extremes of idleness and of over-work — With an artificial existence dangers are multiplied — the parish priest is generally the best adviser, and the most accessible.

CHAPTER VI. PRIMITIVE PENITENCE FOR GREATER OR DEADLY SINS - - - - - III

If confession had been useful merely as a means to obtain direction, the offence caused by sin to GOD would have been forgotten — Confession is made to GOD, and its right end is absolution, bestowed in His Name — Such absolution is now often sought for sins which could not be classed as deadly, though the instructed conscience pronounces them grave — Yet the injunction in our Prayer Book to confess, either before Holy Communion or the last great account, is only concerned with "weighty matters" — This is the old Patristic distinction between mortal and venial — the former were regarded with fear, according to the high value then placed on baptismal grace, from which the soul by such disobedience had fallen — the Primitive Church was hardly induced to abate its harsh treatment of the lapsed — and though private confession became the rule, and was followed, as some think, by private absolution, the distinction was still carefully marked between venial and mortal — in the latter, if pardonable, pardon was conditioned by absolution, either public or private — S. Augustine's teaching here — If we hesitate to follow the Fathers, what does the Bible say are the consequences of sin? — death to the soul, either immediate or when the sin is "full-grown" — hope remains, but GOD's wrath is heavy, and we have no warrant to treat this matter lightly — and if GOD restores penitents, it is well that they should have assurance of pardon, such as the word of absolution conveys — such a token of the Divine love may well be called their salvation.

POSTSCRIPT, on the Sin against the HOLY GHOST.

CHAPTER VII. BINDING AND LOOSING - - - - - 135

“Sacraments for the dead” — after mortal sin, grace forfeited must be recovered — what is absolution? — bondage and imprisonment are the portion of souls that yield to Satan — JESUS CHRIST looses those whom Satan holds — our freedom in CHRIST depends on His power to absolve — this power is exercised not on the righteous but on sinners needing repentance — their wills must consent : if they will not have this loosing, He “binds” them, that is, leaves them in a self-chosen bondage — A human ministry of absolution would follow from the compassion of our LORD — but is better proved by quoting the well-known passages, in S. Matt. xvi. and xviii., and S. John xx. — the power of the keys was reserved in some sense to S. Peter, but in its ordinary exercise is equivalent to that of binding and loosing — this was given to all the apostles, and through them to the Christian priesthood — The charge to remit or retain sins — it is important to mark the occasion of this charge being given ; by which the effect of absolution was made to depend on our LORD’s resurrection — The charge could not refer to baptism, which is not so essentially a ministerial function as absolution, and was not instituted till later — Later than absolution, probably, because the purpose of its institution coincided with the founding of the Church ; whereas absolution was the quickening of the dead through CHRIST’s rising — Still, absolution is not so great as baptism — but it is the quickening of souls that have lost the life of grace, and should be received thankfully and earnestly — The authority of CHRIST’s minister is plainly declared by the passages already quoted.

(Two Postscripts follow, and an Appendix of passages quoted from the sixth Book of Hooker, and from Jeremy Taylor.)

CHAPTER VIII. OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED - - - - - 159

An inevitable task, which the author would have avoided if he could — Some opponents are moved by contempt for the spiritual pretensions of the clergy : these need not detain us long, yet we must rid our minds of prejudice — It is urged that the apostles never asserted, nor used, the power of remitting and retaining sins — Our LORD’s commission would stand, even then — But (if we grant that the instance in 1 Cor. v. and 2 Cor. ii. is a little doubtful), the apostles’ silence, even though absolute, could only be taken in the same way as their silence about *all* sacramental details — To administer sacraments, or to teach sacramental doctrine, was not their principal concern as apostles — Next we hear that absolution is the business not of the priest, but of the whole Church — Quite true, that the whole Body is concerned in beseeching GOD, and no member can work apart from the corporate energy — But not true, that there are no spiritual functions reserved to the clergy only — the Fathers are unanimous here, and the words of S. John xx. 22, 23, convey a distinct commission to the apostles and their successors — A third sort of objectors allow absolution by the clergy only, but deny any effectual sacramental loosing from sins — either *solvere est docere* (by preaching), or else the priest’s part is merely to console persons troubled in mind — Both of these objections are met by careful consideration of the text in S. John. (Bishop Andrewes is quoted here.)

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER VIII. ON THE PENITENTIAL TEACHING OF S. CHRYSOSTOM - - - - - 181

S. Chrysostom is sometimes quoted against sacramental confession — The immense admiration with which Evangelicals justly regard him does

not warrant them in carrying him off to their camp — Both on the Communion of Saints and the Holy Eucharist, his position is Catholic, not Protestant — and it is the same with his teaching on Penitence — He deprecates public confession before an unfeeling crowd, and invites penitents to speak only to GOD — also he seldom alludes to confession before the priest as minister of absolution — But the absolver was usually then a different person from the confessor, — also S. Chrysostom's personal gifts were particularly for preaching — lastly, several passages are quoted which prove him to have been in full accord with other great Fathers, in declaring that the priest has power to absolve, and to heal the wounds revealed to him by confession — Other Fathers are quoted to the same purpose.

CHAPTER IX. THE PREPARATION OF THE PENITENT - - 189

The risk of forfeiting grace through unworthy reception requires not that one should neglect the sacrament, but use diligence in preparation — by contrition, confession, and satisfaction, or promised amendment — Imperfect sorrow is not rejected, if it leads a soul on towards sorrow for the love of GOD — there must be an act of the will, hating and renouncing sin — the memory and understanding are also exercised, in self-examination — Contrition alone would be sufficient, but so careless are we, that confession must be added — confessions without being discursive, should furnish information, but never against others — only the greater faults *must* be mentioned, but we seldom judge with discernment where our own are in question — thus many advise that confessions should be as full as possible — the Church of England makes no rule as to this, nor as to frequency of confession — distinctions between wilful transgressions and sins of infirmity ought not to be ignored — Satisfaction remains: an integral not essential part of the soul's turning — satisfaction is to a great extent involuntary, due to a law of natural, or even physical, retribution — Zacchæus was an instance of adding voluntary satisfaction to the other — Punishments cannot be made really equivalent to sins, yet there should be a correspondence intended, as in ancient Canons of discipline — If we insist that our punishment should be self-chosen, we may err either through softness or excessive rigour — Concluding statement in vindication of use of the term satisfaction.

CHAPTER X. THE PREPARATION OF THE MINISTER - - 209

A priest's ruling of individual consciences must be within limits — too much direction commonly ends in laxness — penitents bargain for a lighter cross, and the priest approves or condones — The doctrine of indulgences has indeed a good side, since full penalties cannot be exacted without cruelty — transference of obligation too is right, if it means that "the strong should bear the infirmities of the weak" — but these doctrines are too much associated with an extension of priestly power, to which the English Church has not consented — The best rule is "Work out your own salvation" — but in the first stage of amendment of life it is imperative that the confessor should be ready with counsel to "support the weak" — His preparation must be very serious and earnest, lest he judge amiss — yet he judges only of the penitents' sincerity — and he has recourse to the gift of the HOLY GHOST — a study of casuistry, though practised by eminent saints, is probably not indispensable to success — but nothing can be done by a priest without both examination of his own inner state, and meditation — Confessors learn to hate sin, as they realise the enduring force of wicked habits — to compassionate the tempted — to give thanks for souls set free — Regulations as to age and qualifications

of confessors ; too little of these in our own Church — Celibates to be preferred to married clergy — The blameless lives of English clergy.

(A Supplement follows, on removal of prejudices, and employment of agencies extraordinary.)

CHAPTER XI. IN THE MISSION FIELD 230

“Make disciples” in S. Matthew is “Preach repentance” in S. Luke — CHRIST sent His apostles to save the nations from their sins — the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world dates from S. Peter’s own conversion, and S. Paul’s — Always, the Gospel spreads where the need of repentance is felt — so in Africa more than in India — yet catechumens are not easily moved to forego heathen customs — the vow of renunciation at baptism means much to an African — still, after baptism, persecution and corrupt example are great hindrances — no perseverance at first — but the neophyte accepts punishment from the Church, and would perhaps endure the primitive penance — confession, however, is much more salutary than excommunication alone — confession should be made almost compulsory for natives who have apostatised — there is no other way — great care is required to inculcate holy fear, else confession itself will be useless — but one should speak encouragingly, for evil looks stronger to them than good — the affections must be enlisted — how far is emotional religion wholesome ?

CHAPTER XII. RELATION OF PENITENCE TO THE TWO SACRAMENTS OF THE GOSPEL. DURATION OF THE PENITENT CONDITION - - - - - 239

Penitence is for the recovery of justifying grace — therefore its place is after baptism, and might be also subsequent to confirmation, if that were viewed as the completion of baptism — should it be before, or after, the first communion ? — Infant communion was prevalent at one time, though not for long in the Western Church — adult catechumens were also admitted to first communion on the same day that they were baptised and confirmed — now, however, we have for most children a long interval between baptism and confirmation — they are capable therefore of moral conduct, and may sin, while neither yet confirmed nor communicants — hence the custom of a first confession before the farther steps — parents however should be consulted as to this — then, the young penitent is not merely restored to the baptismal condition, but must prepare for the fuller grace which he now requires — his first confession is like the sanctification of worshippers before the Passover — he must come to his communion “holy and clean,” and full of hope — In later years, the burden of recurring temptations is felt, and elder Christians still desire the benefit of absolution before communion — so too before the last communion of the dying — last of all comes the hallowed oil — some uncertainty as to what sins are then forgiven — but the Church’s intention is to continue her loving offices to the very end — Little can be said as to penitence after death — the *Te Deum* is most appropriate to the holy dead.

CHAPTER XIII. CONVERSION - - - - - 258

The inward change of conversion — not undesirable for healthy minds, as some pretend — it is the soul’s turning to GOD, who attracts but does not compel any to love Him — children are capable of conversion, but then they must have learned to know GOD, like Samuel — at whatever age, the soul’s response must be simple, humble, and loving — Turning need not

be returning — instances of youthful piety — but the graver conversions, after years spent in sin, are accepted also — The converted give themselves definitely to love and work for GOD — from strength to strength — not always steadfast, yet not often suffering any grievous lapse — having no assurance of final salvation, yet less and less able to forego their settled hope — The difference between S. Bernard and Luther was, that while both believed that CHRIST's righteousness is imputed to those who have faith, Luther taught that sin remains, though covered : S. Bernard, that it may be conquered and destroyed — Calvin limited conversion to persons specially called of GOD, and predestined unto life, making it nearly a mechanical process — The self-surrender of the truly converted is larger and better even than contrition — but piety needs the rules of penitence to keep it within bounds.

CHAPTER XIV. CHRISTIAN PERFECTION - - - - - 276

By conversion the soul begins to ascend — its proper term is perfection — either corporate or individual — the latter has never been attained, save by the holy Mother of GOD — the angel of death does not find us simply "resting from our labours," having no more that we could do — but each Christian can "walk in love, as CHRIST also loved him" — the advance must be slow — "let us be borne on towards perfection" — Wesley wished to hasten the process, lest Christians should lose heart — he understood the word, however, in an inferior sense — yet GOD's power is being perfected, though in our weakness — we have to carry on our conflict with familiar temptations, trusting to the sufficiency of Divine grace — *pugnare et vincere* — we cannot reckon progress, or count marches — but special Providences we may and ought to notice — to some extent there is uniformity in GOD's methods — first, the *via purgativa* for a long distance, perhaps to the end of one's earthly trial — beginning later, the life of unworldliness, in which is no fierce temptation, yet constant vigilance is needful — often GOD relieves the pressure by offering a new vocation — delight of being honoured by such calls — the conviction that our heavenly FATHER trusts us — but best of all means to perfection is the Holy Communion which unites us to CHRIST — among lesser aids, not least is the school of suffering — perfection is not for listless dreamers — but for those only who "fight the good fight of the faith, and lay hold on the life eternal."

CHAPTER XV. THE LAST JUDGMENT. (A Meditation in conclusion) - - - - - 296

The last and crowning motive to repentance is the expectation of Judgment to come — CHRIST's promised return to judge was deeply impressed on the apostles — at first the hope was that He would come soon, and reign on the earth a thousand years — As Christians began to see that His advent would be delayed, their attention turned to the intermediate state, and to the particular judgment on each soul as it quits the body — those subjects are interesting at the present day — still the great thought is, as it was to the apostles, that all must rise again with their bodies, and give account to their only LORD for their own works — though the last Day be not imminent, that must be the consummation at the end — CHRIST's rights over His redeemed require that he should Himself judge them for service rendered or withheld at their will — also, since we are many members in one body in Him, justice demands that we should answer for our conduct towards our brethren and fellow-members — these points may be considered apart from the duration of the world,

or of our own lives — in our Judge, we shall see and know “Him that is true” — all that was contrary to Him will be convicted of falsehood — our whole human nature is to be presented, for CHRIST took flesh of man by His Incarnation, not soul only — the assembling of all mankind (especially of His whole Church) implies that we shall also know one another, and the full extent of the obligation of mutual charity — new faculties will be granted, for apprehending CHRIST, and the members of CHRIST, and the witness of our own hearts — yet no true penitent need fear that his own present judgment of self will be reversed, which he has formed under guidance of the HOLY SPIRIT — there are the same gifts, of wisdom, and counsel, and holy fear, available now as then — only we should learn greater diligence and strictness, in view of this award, final and absolute, to be made by the Eternal Judge of quick and dead — but though the Son of Man will judge us by His life, He requires us not to keep pace with Him, but only to follow His steps — and to the penitent His promise is that “he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

The Use of Penitence.



CHAPTER I.

Sin and Repentance: the Aversion of the Virtuous.

TO one desiring to write on the Christian duty of repentance, the way seems blocked by an apparent wide-spread unconsciousness of sin. Unconsciousness is probably the right word, rather than unbelief. Positive denial of sin is rare, as resolute atheism is rare also; but one feels that in most modern society the subject is remote and unapproachable. Causes and effects are considered without reference to a ghostly enemy, once known as prince of this world. Men make their plans hoping or fearing, as the case may be, but with little steadying of aims by reflection on a Divine intervention, a Divine protection, or a Divine judgment. And when they are passing away from this earth, though life may not have been to them precisely a pleasant promenade,¹ we seldom find them afflicted by the thought of an adverse balance to be redressed hereafter. They are not anxious about guilt incurred through disowning the ever-blessed Trinity, letting alone the Incarnation, or ignoring the spiritual claims of their fellow-men, souls to be saved with their own.

It is easy to be unfair to new ideas. One ought not to say that the moral atmosphere is charged with a deadly indifference. What is seldom spoken of is not, therefore, of necessity quite forgotten. And yet society cannot complain if inferences are drawn from its obvious silence. What would appear is either

¹ M. Ernest Renan is said to have boasted that life had been to him "une très jolie promenade."

that people consider the distribution of right and wrong in this world as unalterable, and so regrets are useless ; or else actually persuade themselves that " life has lost its shadows," and that the modern world is a good world. These two views are not violently opposed. The man who thinks of certain individuals or classes outside his path, that they were born bad, and must end as they began, is not seldom an optimist in whatever more nearly concerns himself. And that apparent optimism is what makes the difficulty when repentance is to be one's theme.

One undeniable note of modern existence is its smoothness. If " the fierceness of man " has not been " turned to the praise " of his Maker, it has been subdued to a very great extent by the irresistible charm of gentle and genial intercourse. Boys go to school and have none of the old battles to fight ; delicate women travel safely where once an armed knight would scarcely have ventured ; war itself is conducted with courtesy between belligerents ; while, in time of peace, the reciprocal obligations of commerce which unite nations are almost bonds of friendship. Perhaps it may be said that our home-life is more disturbed, its quiet less permanent, than of old ; but even if affection be in part diverted from the most natural channels, we have compensation for this in another more extensive brotherhood. Goodwill is everywhere the rule. Congratulations for the prosperous are not more unfailing than the ready sympathy which relieves the afflicted. Indeed it would be scarcely possible to overstate the easiness, the graciousness, the almost unmingled pleasantness, of our best social intercourse. We dwell, as it were, habitually under the rainbow, and forget the storm-clouds. People everywhere seem so good and kind, that one would think " the crooked " had been " made straight " throughout the world we live in, and " the rough places plain."

Then, one may naturally ask, has not this external smoothness a counterpart in the inward spiritual condition of a Christian ? Surely, the secret of all must be, that human nature has been brought under the control of better principles, which have gained ground steadily, till the old temptations are

felt no longer. Persons who do not share this confidence may have reasons enough to show for their scepticism; certainly, all do not believe in the universal flood-tide of improvement. But all must allow that it is at least plausible to infer inward tranquility from outward security. When a man is manifestly at peace with his neighbours, the probability is that he is at peace with himself.

The usual arguments against self-deceit will scarcely hold here. A man may, of course, blind himself to very wicked conduct of his own, either through the force of example in a great majority of those whom he knows, or by some passionate revolt that his own heart makes against censure, destroying for the moment his prudence and sense of proportion. So, too, as is well known, luxurious persons, and those addicted to impure living, lose capacity for discernment, and become like men "past feeling." Others, again, in whom the fever of ambition burns, must on that account deny themselves leisure to give way to moral misgivings. *Quo me cunque rapit tempestas deferor.* They have "committed themselves unto the sea," and are borne along by its waves. But there is no novelty in those conditions. The problem for us is of a different kind. Why are so many good, honest, well-disciplined Christians satisfied with what they find to be the spirit of the age? Or those who are not satisfied—who do their utmost to make the world better, at the risk of making it much less pleasant for themselves—how is it that even they are determined to hear nothing about sin and repentance? One could understand how *indolent* habits might be self-justified through unconsciousness of moral danger; but surely it is strange that active workers in a good cause should retain that tranquil optimism. Strange that they should put forth such glorious energies on behalf of others, and yet be so unwilling to recognise the presence of evil in themselves.¹ One is staggered by the contrast between this and what was, once. We think

¹ Compare R. W. Church (*Human Life and its Conditions*, p. 58): "There is no more pathetic sight, than to see a great mind, a great soul, . . . doing good to mankind, advancing the cause of knowledge, of justice, of humanity, and yet itself negligent of its own moral health; honestly pressing on others the lesson it will not learn."

of S. Paul, showing light to the Gentiles, yet owning himself less than the least of all saints: we remember the spirit of self-abasement, which prompted so many works of piety or of mercy, since the first Pentecost. What has brought about so great a change since then? It is little to say that we are far from the mighty thunderings of Sinai, and "the voice that shook the earth." Go back even fifty years; and in the leaders of religion who then began to restore waste places in England's Church, you will find more sorrow than gaiety—much more of fear and trembling than of self-confidence. But no one can wonder that the Tractarian literature has now so generally ceased to be popular. For we have passed away entirely from that sad and serious attitude of theirs. It would be impossible for us to feel like the author of *The Christian Year*: even less possible to sound an alarm like the *Lyra Apostolica*.

I do not know that much would be gained by attempting to carry the contrast farther. This smooth unconsciousness may be after all—and this was implied more or less when we began—rather apparent than real. We are quite sure that there is still a remnant of earnest souls who think seriously about sin, and humble themselves before GOD as their fathers did in past ages. Partly because they see the misery that sin is causing; the jealousies, disappointments, heart-burnings; the downfall of houses through detection of gigantic frauds; the cruel heartlessness of secret vice towards its victims; the awful defiance of GOD that lurks under civilised unbelief. And partly because their own conscience is awake, and their heart tender; and so when memory opens its pages to their view, though no human ear listen to their cry, they do, still, evening by evening, "arise and go to their Father;" self-accusing, owning themselves sinners in His sight.

Many such there may be: nay, it is certain that there are. But they do not show themselves. No angel from GOD "sets a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry" for all the evil that is done in their day. And so, while their earnest thoughts about sin are thus hidden from observation, the actual hindrance to preaching repentance is what it was stated to be above. Everything combines to make the common

reticence on this subject act as a barrier. It might be otherwise, if the prevailing tone of society were more ostensibly irreligious, in every other respect. Then, the horror caused by such general profanity might impel one to speak, though only as prophet of the wrath to come. But the fact is not so. Contemporary Christianity is both active in good works, and most willing to talk over its beneficent schemes; it has also a great respectfulness and propriety of speech on sacred matters. Only it seems to have lost the sense of sin. This may be illustrated in all sorts of ways:—

(1) Take the study of the Bible. Never before were such immense industry and variety of learning expended on the sacred text; never so little value allowed to the prophets' expectation of the Messiah, or the hope of redemption. Not that higher critics are to be blamed for their literalism: the field of mystical or allegorical interpretation was not for them to enter upon. But it is significant that the higher critics and comparative religionists now seem to content everybody; and that the chapters most generally neglected are those which show what sin is, and what the Divine mercy in redeeming man the sinner.

(2) Then take the study of theology. What has been the motive for that revived interest in Christian Platonism, which now attracts so many thinkers? Surely, the smoothness of the intellectual ascent which it contemplates. The mind of the Christian sage is to be like a sun-lit lake: he is to bask in the beautiful brightness of the knowledge and love of GOD.¹ But where are the sackcloth and ashes? where the humble cry for

¹ This view of Platonism is most usual (perhaps one should say usual with commonplace thinkers, and practical men). One finds something like it in Justin Martyr (*Dialogue with Trypho*, chap. ii.): "The contemplation of ideas furnished my mind with wings, so that in a little while I supposed that I had become wise; and such was my stupidity, I expected forthwith to look upon GOD, for this is the end of Plato's philosophy." S. Justin probably passed through the school too hurriedly to have learned much from it; but can *any* speculative system be enough to engross the energies of a Christian, who knows that GOD has sent him into a world "where there is much to be done, and little to be known?" (*Dr. Johnson*). Dr. Bussell quotes Carlyle, saying, "The mere existence and necessity of a philosophy is an evil. Man is sent hither not to question, but to work" (*School of Plato*, p. 15).

mercy? where humility? "Coming to the *Stromateis* from the Epistle to the Romans" (says a warm admirer of Clement),¹ "we are struck with the comparatively small part assigned to the sense of sin, the need of grace, and the virtue of humility." Such things are simply contemptible to a philosopher. Contempt is thought to have been the chief motive with Marcus Aurelius, in persecuting the Christians.²

(3) Then, the services of the Church. Is it not a constant experience that the truthful Confessions in the Prayer Book offices are in absolute contrast to the euphemism, the almost hedonism, in whatever is spoken from the pulpit?

(4) This, too, is suggestive in its way: that instead of the pastor seeking his lost sheep from house to house and praying with them for their conversion, the meeting-point for priest and people is likely to be so very often a concert, or a summer picnic.

(5) It is true that such church-goers as remain behave well, for the most part, when they are in the house of GOD. And outward reverence is one of the most natural indications of a stricken conscience. One may hope, then, that the bent knees and bowed heads often go with contrite hearts. Yet, can we be sure of the deeper motive? Is it certain that this outward propriety is more than the indispensable token of good breeding? *as* natural, but not *more* natural, in a sacred building than in a drawing-room? At any rate, there is not much here to set against the apparent unwillingness to consider sin and its consequences. Perhaps the moral consciousness of most people may not be so faint as it seems; but, if earnest feelings exist, they are kept well in the background. A man striving to make himself heard on repentance is like one who should push his way into a jealously-guarded fortress.

One might easily add to these instances;³ because, although no doubt there are exceptions everywhere, there is nothing like a whole class of Christian thinkers exempt from the tendency.

¹ See *Clement of Alexandria*, by Hort and Mayor, p. xliv.

² See Ramsay's *Church in the Roman Empire*, p. 351. Marcus derided the ψιλὴν παράταξιν of the Christians: see Merivale's *History*, vol. vii. p. 613.

³ Sin is often mentioned in the sentimental poetry of the day; but in a self-pitying tone, and as if the Saviour's part were merely to soothe the grief of His unhappy child, and to make excuses for him.

No, nor even the most active social reformers; hardly even missionaries to the heathen. In how many places the doctrine of the Cross is now on its defence, timid and faltering, before a self-righteous paganism! How soon the pleading for CHRIST ceases, and the evangelist joins forces with the idolater over some scheme of purely secular improvement! Or look nearer home, and see the lighter tone now infused into that saddest work of all—the recovery of the fallen. One cannot think what it all means, unless there is really no such thing as guilt before GOD, nor provoking Him to wrath by disobedience.

However, we ought to speak with due respect of the desire to do good, which has been alluded to already, and is very marked at the present time. Perhaps if we try to be just to this at first we shall be led on to perceive in what degree it fails, and must fail; and so finally shall gain an opportunity to show how the old Gospel cannot be superseded—how the doctrine of sin and repentance is still necessary, both for the safety, and for the happiness, of mankind.

We need not lay much stress on the fact that some most active reformers make no profession of Christianity. Let us not despise them, however. There can be no such thing as living to help others, unless self is controlled, and passions are mortified. That means a hard struggle between the higher and lower natures: between pity, generous feeling, the instinct of serving one's country, and, on the other hand, all the clinging force of self-flattery and self-indulgence. Add to that—what is sure to come—a good deal of opposition from without, and it must be allowed that the man who still persists in doing good is of a noble spirit. He is not a Christian, and yet he perseveres in spite of conditions the most discouraging: opposed at each step, he yet pushes on till he has secured acceptance for his new science of health, his better schools, his better dwellings,¹ or whatever his scheme may be. One can

¹ One of the healthiest signs is the desire to do away with "poor neighbourhoods," and to get rich and poor once more to dwell side by side. But progress is slow, because the impulse of Catholic charity is lacking, which alone could overbear the resistance from covetousness and vested rights. S. Ambrose reminds the rich that not God, but they are unjust, if the sufferings of the poor continue unrelieved. "Nonne ideo te

hardly refuse him a place among those who "overcome evil with good," redeeming the time. Such men are full of high-minded aims, and it is impossible not to admire a great deal even of what they say.

And yet their not being Christians is a hindrance to their efforts. Allowing for a strength of perseverance in some of their noblest, which may carry them to ultimate victory, we must surely insist that such characters are exceptional. Granted that opposition is sometimes the means of bringing out the best that a man has, a much more frequent consequence from that is disgust, with loss of enthusiasm, and, by degrees, abandonment of good work begun. How often a man of fifty takes a lower view of human nature, and expects his remainder of life to be barren and empty, whereas in youth he had thought to accomplish very much! Once an English poet wrote:—

"I know I am one of nature's little kings,
I know my life's a pain and but a span,
And, to conclude, I know myself a man,
Yet to the least and vilest things am thrall.
I know my sense is mocked with everything:
Which is a proud, and yet a wretched thing."¹

In short, if one has to treat disappointment apart from that illumination which our Christian faith supplies, there will be enough to break the heart of the most sanguine reformer. And not merely because of the natural limitations of a being circumscribed in time and space. Those could cause no intolerable pain. But the sore grief is to feel that one has been wounded by another's malice, and yet has no power in oneself to cope with it. A noble spirit will try to forget what he suffers, for as long as possible; but the heavy feeling of discomfiture will prevail at last. Christians, therefore, do not attach the highest importance to non-Christian effort. These men intend to accomplish much; but they are not "children of the light and of the day," and we cannot wonder if they fail.

divitem feci, ut excusationem habere non possis? . . . Numquid tu infirmus eras? Numquid non poteras subvenire?" (*De Offic. Ministr.* lib. i. cap. 16).

¹ From an Elizabethan poet, Sir John Davies; quoted in Courthope's *History of English Poetry*, vol. iii. p. 56.

They intend to wage a splendid warfare; but we miss from their armour "the breastplate of faith and love," and "the hope of salvation," which should be their "helmet." The cardinal virtues, perhaps, they may have; but what are those worth, except as transfigured by infusion of the theological?¹ No; the non-Christian reformer aims high, but not high enough to regenerate society, not high enough to save the world. Disappointment will not always make him idle, but it will effectually drag him down to a lower level of usefulness. The salt will lose its savour.

To turn, then, to those who are Christians, and whose beneficent purposes are always referred to CHRIST as their one Author and Example; but who seem, nevertheless, to be under that same law of unconsciousness of sin, to which nearly the whole modern world is subject. We shall have to see that even these are prone to disappointment, and, in very many cases, are vitiated by it when it comes, if not entirely crushed. They, too, feel their step heavy, and their eyesight dim, at those very moments when there is greatest need of a clear judgment and firm resolution. And in this there is nothing wonderful, because, though they think that they are following CHRIST, they are not really "men of the Way."² They are not following Him by the one road where fellowship with His life and work is attainable.

Now this may seem both a difficult thing to prove, and a most ungracious task to have attempted. Ungracious, especially, or worse, it would be to throw doubt on the sincerity of any man's attachment to Him who is the only LORD of us all, unless one were quite convinced that he was offering what CHRIST would never accept. And yet it may be that this is actually the case. Not that the devotion of these persons to our LORD is wrong in itself, but that it lacks the right foundation. Let us try to deal with them fairly, making full allowance for the attraction that many among them feel towards that most holy Name.

They may be supposed to reason somewhat as follows:

¹ See Dante (*Purgat. Cant. xxxi. iii.*): "Le tre di là, che miran più profondo."

² Acts ix. 2.

"High hopes and generous aims can be conceived without the guiding star of faith. But, clearly, they agree best with Christianity.' 'Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?' The eagerness of the question was in proportion to the speaker's consciousness of the adorable presence in which he stood. And we, in England, have by no means lost the habit of looking to JESUS CHRIST as consummator of the best desires of the human heart. Of all really unselfish activity on behalf of others, He alone is the author and finisher. We, because we understand this, continue to study His gracious Person with unabated interest. We call to mind His words, His promises; we represent to ourselves the loving look of His upturned face when He kneels in prayer on our behalf. We almost feel the sway of that strong impulse which moved Him when He said, 'Father, I will that they whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am.' This indeed would have been the same in some measure had the question been merely of that inevitable daily business, in which all industrious and honourable men are engaged. When we were absorbed in any of those toilsome enterprises by which men live and fight out their struggle for existence, we should have been glad to assure ourselves of His protection and sympathy. We should have had more self-respect—have felt ourselves more fit to trust and to be trusted, more capable of that honest and courageous dealing which deserves success—if we were striving to keep our places in the flock which is led onward by that true Shepherd. But much more, now that we have the unselfish aim of rendering service to our brethren; because, now, our aim is His aim. 'I have given you a commandment, that ye should do as I have done to you.'"

To be associated thus with our Blessed LORD in doing good ought to be, and really is to many excellent persons, a thought unspeakably delightful. There are those who honestly feel that to gain the whole world would be of small account when

¹ Christian faith, says Newman (*Lect. on Justific.*, p. 273), "has converted what was grovelling and niggardly into high and generous self-devotion." See the pictures drawn by Apologists of the self-sacrificing kindness of Christians (e.g. *Aristid. Apol.* xv.; *Epistle to Diognetus*, v.; *S. Justin Martyr, Apol.* i. 67; *Athenagoras, Plea for Christians*, xi.).

compared with the joy of bringing comfort to CHRIST'S little ones. Nor are they apt to admit discouragement very quickly. If opposition could be an incentive to greater exertion where the Christian motive was lacking, how much more when it is present!¹ Opposition—it has been said a thousand times—is safer for a Christian than the popularity which so often corrupts. Those who are able regularly to give their “cup of cold water” without fear of having it dashed aside by hostile hands, may perhaps take little interest in continuing so slight a boon. But bring them to face antagonism, and the probability is that they will not only give, but give much more than what they began with. Instead of letting the ring close round them they will “spread forth their hands in the midst” of their enemies,² claiming larger space in which to do GOD'S work. And this, because they have found their “way to escape,” in a fellowship with the Man of Sorrows. By realising their discipleship through suffering they heal the wound of their grief, and are at rest. And more: the dear Master is not only their Physician and Protector; they feel that He both gives them their work, and works with them. Who can be against them when that is so? “It is CHRIST JESUS that died, yea, rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of GOD, who also maketh intercession for us.”

So, then, for a long while, there is little inclination to “be weary in well-doing.” Opposition seldom rises into persecution under the smooth conditions which now prevail. Where it is, nevertheless, serious and stubborn, its first effect upon anyone who professes himself a Christian is actually to add zest to the service he renders; (and this, although he may be much mistaken in what he conceives his relation to CHRIST to be). His hope is not “in this life only;” his goal is not to be sought for among things temporal; death is no longer to him the *ultima linea rerum*, but a gate through which hope passes readily. If beset by ingratitude and wrong, of which the taste must at times be bitter, he sets his face towards an irreversible

¹ To S. Paul, στενοχωρίαι were occasions of revival of energy. “Our mouth is open, our heart is enlarged.” (See Rom. viii. 35; 2 Cor. vi. 4, xii. 10).

² Isaiah xxvi. 11.

righteous judgment, to which all will be subjected when the supreme Arbiter shall appear. Or, even without soreness of spirit, yet as but half satisfied with the best results attainable here below, he takes pleasure in expecting something far better than that best—a *summum bonum*¹ to be revealed hereafter. But all the time he is *working* towards the consummation. He is quite content without much visible fruit, being assured that the servant is following the Master, and that the Master's harvest must come at last. Hopes that had been growing pale shine out again at that prospect. The soul finds its "anchor both sure and steadfast."² Such men can bow their heads calmly to disappointment; nay, if it be GOD'S will, they can surrender gladly to the arrest of an early death.³

One has tried to be just to these excellent persons, though suspecting them of a presumption which will be presently exposed. Let us now, first, observe that their ideas are almost wholly Christian. They want to work for CHRIST, and to have success under His leadership only. Possibly, indeed, this may be more than they, or any of the best whom the Church contains, intend at all times; but let us give them credit for the utmost that is consistent with their position. Then we shall see that, whatever happens in the career that they have chosen, their ideas fall short of the real "truth that is in JESUS." Their foundation of effort is not laid in a humble acknowledgment of personal unfitness. They do not know what their need is of CHRIST as Saviour. And to show this will be enough for our purpose in these chapters, which is, not to stay at visible results—success or failure—but to exhibit the true Christian doctrine of sin, and the necessary outlines of Christian repentance.

¹ On the *Summum Bonum*, see S. Aug. (*De Mor. Eccles.* lib. i.).

² Hope is the anchor; yet always hope in the Crucified. Compare Donne's gift to George Herbert of "one of my seals of the anchor and CHRIST." He had "caused a number of heliotropian stones to be engraved, and set in gold as seals or rings, with the figure of CHRIST crucified on an anchor." (See *Walton's Lives*.)

³ Compare Shakspere (*Sonnet lxxiv.*):

. . . "When that fell arrest,
Without all bail, shall carry me away," etc.

It is impossible that we can become perfect Christians, "always abounding in the work of the LORD," if we take one side only of our holy religion, and refuse to look at the other.

No doubt to have fellowship with CHRIST is a Christian's purest joy; while He is with us no evil-doers can have power to hurt or hinder. But, then, the question is, What does the Name of CHRIST mean to our apprehension? In what relation does it stand to our life and work from first to last? What would be our intention if we made our petition to Almighty GOD in the form supplied in the Prayer Book: that "in all our works *begun, continued, and ended in Him*, we may glorify His holy Name; through JESUS CHRIST our LORD?" Particularly, is our "beginning in Him" to be understood as coincident with, or previous to any other beginning that could be made by the use of natural faculties? How do we take such texts as "Apart from Me ye can do nothing?" or, "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is JESUS CHRIST?" And what do we think is our concern with the notable passage of S. Paul, which follows? "All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of GOD; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in CHRIST JESUS: whom GOD set forth to be a propitiation, through faith by His Blood, to show His righteousness, because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of GOD; for the showing, I say, of His righteousness at this present season: that He might Himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in JESUS."¹

One may fear that some of the notions formed are not merely inadequate, but inadequate from what one must call wilful misconception. No one denies the existence of a certain enthusiasm for JESUS of Nazareth: scarcely any conscientious person would desire to see it less than it is. Close attention is bestowed on His sacred Humanity, and it would be unfair not to suppose that that sweet pattern is taken home to many hearts to be imitated. But with what sort of imitation? The fact seems to be that men begin with

¹ Rom. iii. 23-27.

preconceptions of what type of goodness is most congenial to the requirements of the modern world, and then endeavour to make JESUS CHRIST conform to these ideas. Thus He becomes a sociable being of our own sort, in whose company the polite and well-mannered may march gaily forward. They say in effect, Let us have Him for our good and careful Shepherd; let Him bless our little children, go with us to the marriage-feast, lift up the tone of our young men, comfort our weak and afflicted; above all, send us out to labour in His harvest, promising to rejoice with us when the crop is gathered in. How well it all sounds! But can we draw a picture like this, and call it complete without wilful perversion of the facts?

What has the Name of JESUS really always stood for—"the same yesterday, and to-day, and through the ages?" What is the testimony of S. John, or of S. Paul? Surely, this Name, in which all things in heaven and earth and under the earth must bow, and to which all yield obedience, is never a name for weak man to accommodate to his follies, or to reconcile with the taste and fashion of an hour? That is no more practicable, really, for an exquisite civilisation like ours, than for the savage who washes his spears in the blood of an enemy. Nay, the love of His compassionate heart has been, from the first, entirely human, but yet, also, "greater than the heavens." So, then, must it remain to the end of time. "Ye are from beneath, I am from above." Between us, in our very best natural development, and JESUS CHRIST, lies a deep gulf of separation. His words, His deeds, were not only more excellent than ours; they actually condemn us by force of contrast. With much that is done upon earth He does not merely refuse to associate Himself. He comes to destroy it. It is an offence to Him. If not removed and renounced while we live, He will judge us for it at the end of all things. And, again, if we do consent to renounce it and to become His disciples indeed, then, most likely, we shall be "hated of all men, for His Name's sake." A very different thing from opposition to some light-hearted scheme of philanthropy!

Our LORD is not only superior to the common human standards; He is opposed to them. All of us must know

this sooner or later. Some day, something that we read of Him in one or other of the Gospels, makes us feel how little we have understood Him. Perhaps it is His severity; perhaps the luxuriance of His tender pity; perhaps the unfathomable depth of His sorrow; perhaps that heavenward bent of His daily walk, which found utterance at last in passionate pleading: "If ye loved Me ye would rejoice, because I go to My FATHER." What was the secret of it all?

The secret was, that He had come into a world of sin, being Himself without sin. Thus His love was outraged, and He suffered by a daily martyrdom; He was a "sign spoken against," a victim of the malice of Satan, and of the cruel wrath of proud and envious men. But, however intense, opposition and persecution did not mean defeat to JESUS CHRIST. His death was a personal triumph, and, far more, it was a propitiation for all our sins. And yet, after His atoning death, as before, He left men free to despise Him if they would, and to lead their lives apart from Him, and to say that they had not sinned. But He did not leave them free to do good without Him. All conflict with evil in future must be a taking up of His Cross, and following Him. All striving after personal amendment must have for its foundation faith in the salvation wrought through His Blood—repentance for the sins which caused that Blood to flow.

Our Blessed LORD'S business with sins can only be either to take them away here, or to judge them hereafter. And if we are to go forward with Him along life's journey, He must first have taken away our sins. Did He ever allow exceptions to this rule? did He at any time let fall an intimation that in the following centuries a race might be discovered so admirably refined and cultured as to need none of His redemption? Never, certainly. He said of Himself that He came, simply, "to save the world." And when we hear Him described as a Being "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners," we, therefore, understand that He is separate from each and all of the human race, unless He has saved them through the merits of His Passion.

Here is the great difficulty to this present generation.

S. John, indeed, writes—can we think that he wrote only for his own day?—"If we say that we have not sinned, we make GOD a liar, and His word is not in us." But how loud and vehement, against S. John, are the self-justifying voices that we now hear! Or listen when they try to speak calmly; perhaps, somewhat as follows:—"We forbear to criticise disrespectfully that penitential language which is still employed by persons commissioned to preach, or holding authority in the Church. That has always had a place in the Bible, and our Prayer Book is full of it. But it cannot consist with modern progress.¹ The first founders of Christianity were trammelled by the old sacrificial system; but there has been a steady process of emancipation since then, and it is the fact that, now, sin is rarely mentioned among educated people. Modern society does not require to be weighed down by a sense of guilt; on the contrary, we ought to have at command an inexhaustible fund of cheerfulness. Then we may cope with those unjust and unequal social conditions, and all other miseries, which have come down from our forefathers.² But we should never get through our work if we were morbid and downcast."³

¹ Compare Dean Church (*Cathedral Sermons*, p. 77): "We are told that it is time to attend to the real subjects of the day, the calls of justice, the redress of wrongs, the wants and sufferings of the poor."

² It would be most unfair not to show grateful appreciation of the sincere pity that is felt for, what Archbishop Alexander has called, "the ceaseless moaning of the sea of human sorrow." Benevolent agencies are innumerable; though one may fear that most of the deeper sources of wrong remain untouched.

³ Morbid recollection is wholly distinct from the "mourning" which our Saviour blessed; of which S. Peter was an example, not only when he "wept bitterly" at first, but when, according to the tradition, in after years, each night's cock-crowing would remind him of his fall. S. Peter was not, therefore, inactive and self-absorbed. Yet these two things are often confused together. Sabatier, in his beautiful study of the conversion of S. Francis, asks us to believe that, if the saint had not quickly forgotten the sinful wildness of his youth, he must have fallen into "un effroyable égoïsme" (*Vie de S. Franç.* chap. ii.). When God "for our sins is justly displeased," we dare not blind our eyes to His wrath, even though "in His wrath He thinketh upon mercy;" but this is not to turn our attention from the wants of our afflicted brethren.

To which one might reply, that the Gospel, assuredly, requires no man to be low-spirited.¹ The question is, whether we are to dispense with the salvation wrought by JESUS CHRIST, and sever our connection with Him?

And one can fancy a modern optimist protesting that that is not what he intends: "There is no reason why we should part company with the true 'Son of Man.' Rather, we hail Him as our leader, trusting to His Incarnation as the starting-point and principle of recovery for all whom He has made His brethren. In that sense, we believe, He has 'brought life and immortality to light through His Gospel.' And we say that He reconciles mankind to GOD, because He delivers from the bondage of bad habits by the illumination of His example. Bad habits unfit men for their higher destiny. In delivering from those, JESUS CHRIST destroys the works of the devil, and becomes 'the Way' by which we approach the supreme FATHER."

But what, then, of the Cross? Is it nothing that CHRIST died for our sins?

Again the answer is returned: "He died, as all of us feel and confess, out of tender pity and compassion. His own people, how low they had fallen! yet they would not come to Him for deliverance. One way alone remained: that He should die for them. By a generous and fearless resolve He gave Himself a willing victim to the most terrible of deaths, letting them slay Him though for their sakes He suffered, thus vindicating the sincerity of His incredible love. That was the most perfect example in all history of a purely unselfish and vicarious bearing of pain. Its moral effect could not be limited to those of His own nation: it has been felt throughout the world, and is felt even now. But in no other sense but this do we understand what has been called CHRIST'S atonement, or propitiation for sin. We do not stand or fall by a particular interpretation, now generally exploded, of the

¹ Among primitive writers, Hermas is strong on this: "Omnis hilaris vir bene operatur, et bona sapit, et contemnit injustitiam. Vir autem tristis male facit, quia tristem facit Spiritum sanctum, qui datus est homini hilari" (*Mandat.* x. 3). So, too, S. Augustine (*De Catech. Rud.*), blames the "ariditas mœstitiæ."

fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. We cannot lay our burden upon Him instead of manfully bearing it ourselves.”¹

This is what we have to hear. Perhaps S. Peter's thoughts about fellowship with his Master were much the same, before he had learned wisdom by the three denials. But we know, now, that this is only “speaking into the air;” it is the voice of presumption, the mere vanity of self-confidence. They who turn their backs upon the sacrifice of Calvary do but prove their utter ignorance of the real nature of that sin which the Lamb of GOD came to take away. If we do not lay our burden upon Him we cannot bear it ourselves, and it will crush us. They may talk, in simple honesty, of doing right, or wishing to do it; but they have not learned that in their Saviour's wounds is their only refuge from the just wrath of Almighty GOD. No mere manly endurance of opposition or misfortunes can shelter them from that “overflowing scourge.” Therefore, their ideas of reformation, however well meant, are altogether inadequate, and their principles what only ignorance could approve. That vision of a great Leader, and of themselves keeping pace with Him, and sharing His triumphs, must vanish into thin air. Sins have made that fondly imagined fellowship impossible. Sin strikes across the path of upward progress,² and forbids access to our sinless LORD. They must learn to confess that JESUS CHRIST is not sociable to such as them, whatever the boasted grace of their modern culture, however sincere their longing to improve everything that they can reach and touch. For there is a record against them—a guilt which, if they owned it truly, would become an overclouding sorrow, begloomng the whole prospect.

What is it which the modern optimism wants or demands?

¹ Contrast with this S. Ambrose (*In S. Luc.* lib. vi. 101): “Vidētis quod in uno Christi nomine omnia sint. Ipse est enim Christus qui natus est ex Virgine, ipse est qui mirabilia fecit in populo, ipse qui mortuus est pro peccatis nostris, et resurrexit a mortuis. Unum horum si retraxeris, retraxisti salutem tuam . . . Nemo Christi nomen negat; sed negat Christum, qui non omnia quæ Christi sunt confitetur.”

² S. Basil (*De Bapt.* lib. ii. qu. vii.). asks *εἰ δυνατόν ἐστι τὸν ἁμαρτία δουλεύοντα ποιῆν δικαίωμα*; and shows that it is impossible, quoting S. John viii. 34, and S. Matt. vi. 24. Then, to show how this may be made possible after repentance, he quotes 2 Cor. vii. 1.

That one should expunge a principal part, not only of apostolic doctrine, but of the very words of Him who is the Truth. For how, or from whence, but from His own lips, have we been taught that JESUS came "to give His life a ransom for many?" While, of apostles, we must now no longer quote S. Paul, declaring "the Name of JESUS to be above every name;" nor, of evangelists, S. Matthew, explaining why that Name was given. JESUS could not have "saved His people from their sins" if there were no sins of ours to threaten destruction.

Nay, but our own hearts are against a self-complacency, which in this grievous fashion abuses the Gospel message. And "if our heart condemn us, GOD is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." There is no gainsaying the truth of those words, whoever had written them. The end can only be an awakening of the terrors of conscience, which will be less uneasy for the sins that were hidden, than for the madness of having hidden them so long. "Behold, I will enter into judgment with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned. . . . For the LORD hath rejected thy confidences, and thou shalt not prosper in them."¹

With an uneasy conscience there can be no joy in attempting the part of reformer or benefactor. Yet the importance of cheerfulness cannot well be exaggerated.² If that was urged from the other side, it was urged sensibly enough. To be heavy-hearted causes a contraction of energy. Before anything else, one must rid himself of that weight. But can modern optimism effect the deliverance? If not, one may surely think that the time is come to enquire whether the old solution was not, after all, the best and truest.

S. Luke tells again and again how full of joy were the first Christian evangelists. The beginning of man's recovery through the Gospel was like a great wave of joy overflowing

¹ Jeremiah ii. 35, 37.

² Compare *ὁ ἐλεῶν, ἐν ἰλαρότητι* (Rom. xii. 8); also a beautiful passage of Clement (*Strom.* vii. chap. vii. 35), πάντα τοίνυν τὸν βίον ἐορτὴν ἄγοντες, πάντῃ πάντοθεν παρῆναι τὸν Θεὸν πεπεισμένοι, γεωργοῦμεν αἰνοῦντες, πλέομεν ὑμνοῦντες, κατὰ τὴν ἁλλήν πολιτείαν ἐνθέως ἀναστρεφόμεθα. [We converse together, and move about as in God.]

the earth: it was a second exodus from Egypt. Now we must remember that those light hearts, that eager happiness, were not due only to the baptism in fire at Pentecost. Before that, our Redeemer had given His peace to the apostles, and showed the wounds of His Passion. When "the disciples were glad" on seeing the LORD, the chief cause was His announcement of pardon, to sinners wherever found, through His Blood so lately shed. That went before the promise of power from on high. And when S. Peter turned to his countrymen, conscious of having a gift to offer that was more than silver and gold, he chose this way to convey it: "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."

Repentance can have no meaning, except to those deeply convinced of sin; while, on the other hand, from conviction of sin to repentance, the way is so straight and obvious, that few fail to find it: if, that is, they will look up to where their Saviour awaits them, drawing them to Him from His Cross. Too often they keep their eyes averted from Him; and that is why the primary obstacle was stated to be unconsciousness of sin, and unwillingness to repent. Unconsciousness is a serious obstacle, because the indifference which it produces is mainly among people of good repute, induced in great measure by the quiet, peaceful times which so many now enjoy. These virtuous ones would think it hard to have to descend from their fancied pure air into the Stygian pool which too surely lies beneath; nor is it every one's business to explore "the depths of Satan." But it *is* the bounden duty of every one to confess his sins. Thus the method adopted in this chapter may be most convenient: not to call a man back from honourable and beneficent employment, but rather to encourage him to go on and see for himself what it is that hinders, and what forbids him to account himself a fellow-worker with CHRIST. Then, perhaps, bitterly opposed in some well-intentioned scheme for the relief of his brethren, he will look wistfully for a cool breeze to divide the flames, and wonder why he cannot reach the supernal sources of comfort. Before long he makes the discovery. He learns that it is hard for anyone to rejoice in GOD'S protecting love who refuses to mourn for his own long

ebellion against GOD. A *secret* rebellion, doubtless, which has made little difference to his position in the Christian world; still, this secret sin, and not that opposition from without, has been his real enemy. This is a painful schooling, but it bears fruit in submission at last. When any rude shock to self-esteem is felt to have been deserved, scales fall from one's eyes, and a man realises what the plague of his own heart has been. It need not be any grievous lapse that is brought to mind, no cruel fraud, no flagrant unbelief, no foul impurity. Perhaps what troubles his conscience is merely a long course of self-deceit: no particular vice, but a vain pretence of doing good to others, without any real soundness in his own too inconsistent practice. *Then*, repentance at once becomes desirable. While sin remains there can only be frustration of hope, separation from GOD, despair of union with CHRIST. When a sin has once been acknowledged before GOD, repentance following does away with the whole guilt of that sin. "Neither do I condemn thee; go thy way; from henceforth sin no more."¹

This is the complement of that Faith which embraces redemption through the Saviour's Blood. Faith does not justify without repentance. Repentance remains the alone condition for obtaining the forgiveness promised. By use of repentance all the best that men are capable of will be once more brought within view. Every barrier falls before the charm of that word. But nothing else will join us to Him who is "the hope of all the ends of the earth."

The best missionaries have ever been those who had the deepest sense of evil in their own consciences.² Those, on the other hand, who go to convert the heathen, full of self-confidence, but little knowing how they themselves stand before "the Truth," often lose their faith at the first repulse.

What the modern world so greatly fails to comprehend is, that its proud hopes cannot be realised except in CHRIST, and

¹ See S. Aug. (*Tract.* xxxiii. *In S. Joann.*): "Et ille, Nec ego te condemnabo; a quo te forte damnari timuisti, quia in me peccatum non invenisti."

² See, for instance, 1 Tim. i. 12-14.

in CHRIST as Saviour of sinners. Progress of a sort there may be, without guilt acknowledged, or penance done; but never the right progress. For instance, no one pretends that wealth and honour, knowledge, comforts, luxuries, are fairly distributed by man to man; and life is but a hustling race, in which the weaker find no favour, while the foremost are urged on to unworthy deeds by a constant pressure from behind.¹ What weariness in these! what satiety! what longing to be honest and upright! But they cannot till they have repented truly of past sins. What they can do is only to go forward as before, performing what is expected of them, and trying to forget all else. And yet mingled with the applause for this vain show of success, come bitter cries from a crowd less fortunate, who feel themselves shut out, neglected, trodden down. And they, too, need repentance to bring them peace. But the rich must humble themselves by the side of the poor, the well-learned with the simplest. Let there be no difference. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of GOD;" all must be "justified freely by His grace." Let the penitence of the most ignorant be matched with the penitence of the great and wise. Let all learn that they were bought by the same saving Blood, and have access to the same (but that the only) gate which the Divine mercy holds open. So let them begin to heal each other's wounds. Then the days of joy will have their turn; the different classes understanding one another at last, because they have met on the common soil of humility and self-abasement—reposing at last in the Divine sympathy of Him who hath borne our every grief, "and carried our sorrows."

Certainly the happiest are they who have believed, and observed, and kept these things from their childhood upwards.

Compare Shakspeare (*Troilus and Cressida*, Act iii. sc. 3):—

"Take the instant way;

For emulation hath a thousand sons,
That one by one pursue; if you give way,
Or hedge aside from the direct forthright,
Like to an entered tide, they all rush by,
And leave you hindmost."

Justice may require that full allowance be made for many who are slow to receive them; because it must in truth be hard to recognise moral disease under such a smiling surface as everywhere now appears. But certainly those are happiest who, through evil report and good report, have steadily held before them that sternly-sweet revelation which the world excludes from view, concerning sin, the dreadful wrath of GOD, redemption through the Blood of CHRIST, and our own call to repentance through faith in Him. Otherwise one may come to know these things by sad experience, too late to escape from the necessity of "reaping as we have sown." We shall be convinced, and we shall repent, but we shall not, in this world, arrive at perfect soundness; we shall lack that joyous enthusiasm which is so necessary for combating the evils which surround our path. The happier way is to have learned these things in childhood, cherishing our lesson ever after, with the simplicity of little children. "Authority" [not instead of but] "before reasoning," says S. Augustine, "is the proper natural order."¹ Authority owned and responded to by loyal obedience. Those who begin thus are likely to prove themselves able warriors against wrong. Perhaps the prime of their consecrated manhood will be marked by victory. First, "I have written to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His Name's sake." And then, "I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one." Far-reaching, indeed, are the issues of the Divine forgiveness. We shall have to see, as we proceed, how the new creation of each ransomed soul tends to its assured salvation, and a glory which is of GOD. By the way of repentance we are called to possession of the highest good—the "good part not to be taken away." As S. Augustine says again, *Summum bonum tale esse debet, quod non amittat invitus*.²

So bright, indeed, is this prospect which the mercy of

¹ See S. Aug. (*De Mor. Eccl. Cath.* cap. i. 3): "Unde igitur exordiar? ab auctoritate, an a ratione? Naturæ quidem ordo ita se habet, ut cum aliquid discimus, rationem præcedat auctoritas. Nam infirma ratio videri potest, quæ cum reddita fuerit, auctoritatem postea, per quam firmatur, assumit."

² S. Aug. (*De Moribus Eccles.* cap. iii.).

an Almighty Father holds out to His children, that it causes happiness to those far removed from our cares and sorrows. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of GOD over one sinner that repenteth." And that which angels exult when they behold ought not to be delayed by man till the conditions have become difficult and discouraging. The duty of repentance is not a task to be embraced after long-protracted stubborn resistance. Why should it? The shadow of death does not lie thick over our path when we "arise and go to our FATHER" by sincere acknowledgment of a fault. Self-examination has sometimes been compared to the opening of a darksome well. On the contrary, it is letting in heaven's light, that we may know whatever the HOLY SPIRIT has to reveal, full of glorious promise. On the contrary, he who makes true confession before GOD goes where sunshine awaits him in that everlasting love which spares, restores, and blesses.

This is what makes a life worth living. Not to harden one's will and blind one's eyes till, at last, when self-accusation begins, we have wandered so far that the very way to our home is lost; but rather, while pleading guilty, and owning what has surely been amiss, never to approach the Throne of grace with other than a trustful heart. This is the weakness which withal is strong, the sorrow which is turned to joy.

It is also the "poverty which makes many rich." For, inasmuch as we are GOD'S penitent children, we learn a way not only of pleading for ourselves, but of making our lament into the same merciful ears for those far-extending evils and miseries which are not our own. And this with the same confidence as before, because we know that such intercessions will obtain a gracious hearing and favourable answer. He who every day delivers us from the burden of our own sins, will He not show a way to redeem others also from bondage? One follows from the other. As penitents, we have "tasted and seen how gracious the LORD is." Now, looking out over the great world-wide desolation, the wreck and ruin that Satan has caused, we feel how "nothing can be too hard for the LORD," and have hope that even upon death will follow

resurrection. But this can only be realised by those to whom penitence has become the settled habit and temper of their lives. To them a GOD of mercy and pity is no stranger. That makes the whole difference to their work as reformers.

To conclude, there is great opposition in the modern world to any treatment of sin on the old serious penitential lines. Many object to it because, enjoying such smooth outward conditions as they usually do, they cannot see why the soul's inner life should be carried sadly over the rugged ways of self-chastisement. Others, who realise that there is a battle to be fought for truth and righteousness, trust largely to their own instinctive hatred of current forms of evil, not without grateful sense of what they owe to the inspiration of a perfect example in the meek and lowly JESUS. Perhaps that would be called the only religion fit for a "healthy-minded" person. But does it satisfy all requirements? Can the natural will of man afford to depend only on the moving presence of an example? Surely not, if sin is what we are taught to call it in the sacred Scriptures. Not, for instance, if the soul that sins *dies* by its sin. Then, surely, we must turn to JESUS CHRIST not merely for exhortation and comfort, but in order that, as we believe on His Name, He may be to us "the resurrection and the life."

A man could be saved very well by the mere exercise of his free will,¹ and might save others, too, if he had nothing worse to part with than errors of inexperience. But if he has come to be convinced of personal guilt in offending against the majesty, or the love, of a holy GOD, then the proud head droops, and the cry for mercy is heard; and, when the sinner once more stands erect, he confesses that "by the grace of GOD I am what I am."

¹ See Bright's *Age of the Fathers*, ii. p. 164: "Pelagius was thoroughly impressed with the one idea that men's wills needed rousing into energy; that they must, by all possible means, be dragged out of their comfortable inaction; that they, half wilfully perhaps, underrated their own power of doing right, and were content with passively expecting to be wrought upon, moulded, and saved by a mercy and bounty which should leave them nothing to do."

After all, "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of GOD that hath mercy."

In the next chapter will be noticed some other causes of the dislike commonly felt. What have been mentioned here are the most serious difficulties. The suggestion made from our side, that one may argue from the failure of a man's best efforts to his personal sinfulness and need of a Divine Saviour, will not commend itself equally to all minds. However, that argument cannot be pursued farther now. We must take our stand on the fact that our Blessed LORD did with His own lips command "repentance and remission of sins to be preached to all nations," and, with that intent, bestowed the HOLY SPIRIT upon His Church.

There are still very many of our countrymen who accept that revelation of His will with becoming reverence. It should be our joy that we have such around us to be loved and honoured. They, at least, feel no disposition either to make light of sin, or to despise the Divine mercy in JESUS CHRIST. They cling fast to eternal hopes centered in Him crucified and risen from the dead. This chapter's battle is not required for such sincere and humble-minded Christians.

Nevertheless, there are doubts which will arise: not so much on the obligation of repentance, as the methods and limitations of its use in the Church. For this is no mere emotional feeling, to be indulged according to the humour of the moment, but has had, from time immemorial, a very well-defined tangible outline. Penitence has place in history as a Sacrament of the Church;¹ not, indeed, so "necessary to salvation" as Baptism and Holy Communion, yet given, as all sacraments are *ut rite illis uteremur*.² By Penitence grace is restored to those who submit dutifully to its discipline, bringing to it their contrition, confession, and satisfaction for personal

¹ It will be seen hereafter that the author uses some caution in speaking of Penitence, or Penance, as a Sacrament. Cranmer's objection, however, was not much to the point: "The Scripture taketh Penance for a pure conversion of a sinner in heart and mind from his sins to God" (*Works*, vol. ii. p. 100). Undoubtedly; yet the instrument in such conversion and restoration might be a sacrament.

² See Article xxv.

transgressions.¹ That is not a full account of this means of grace; yet, for so far as it goes, it may be bold and striking enough to arouse some critical attention. In fact, some amount of hostile opinion will have to be encountered; and whatever the issue, not courage merely will be required on our part, but much "meekness of wisdom"² also. No good end will be served by insisting for ever on ancient custom without making allowance for others which, though of later date, may suffer no disadvantage by being compared with the ancient. Yet the Church's way is best; and when, trusting honestly to her guidance, we look up to the Almighty hand which governs all, we do indeed make proof of—

"mercy, carried infinite degrees
Beyond the tenderness of human hearts."³

Only, in whatever may have to be written on our very difficult subject, let us rest assured that there never ought to be—hardly can be—a word that savours of unrighteous arrogance. Neither that, nor narrowness, nor obscurity, in the doctrine by which souls are led back to a GOD who knows the hearts of all, and their several needs.

Deus, qui peccantium animas non vis perire, sed culpas: contine, quam meremur, iram, et quam precamur, super nos effunde clementiam; ut de mœrore gaudium tuæ misericordiæ consequi mereamur. Per Jesum, etc. (Penitential Prayers, Gregorian Sacramentary).

¹ Bishop Wilson says (*Sacra Privata, Thursday Meditations*), "That perfect penance which CHRIST requireth consists of contrition, confession, and amendment of former life, and obedient reconciliation to the laws and will of God."

² See S. James iii. 13.

³ From Wordsworth's *Excursion*, book iv.

CHAPTER II.

Causes of divided feeling within the Church.

WE have seen what is one, at least, of the chief obstacles to penitence. Aversion to the mention of sin may exist in three ways. Either it is found among avowed sceptics, some of whom (though unhappily not all) are sincere, and deserve much compassion; or in the great crowd of languid thinkers, who, without working out for themselves a rival scheme, are glad to push far away the fear of an offended GOD and His punishments; or else among opponents who are of a much higher quality, and nearer to the Christian pattern. These last are neither thoughtless nor languid: there are men of eminent virtue among them. But they appear to believe that, by refusing the painful and humiliating task of self-chastisement, they keep themselves free to attempt much that would have been else impossible, for their country's good and their own. Nor is it likely perhaps that these will be moved by arguments taken from the disappointments which await reformers who have not made their peace with GOD through forgiveness of sins.

One thing however is plain when we consider antagonists of this kind. Whatever their confidence in progress without penitence, none can pretend that the Bible is on their side, or the Book of Common Prayer. Of course, they would allow that they are not, and yet insist that their cause survives, and is strong. But for us, who desire to be loyal children of the Church, it is impossible not to feel that the controversy is now at an end; because we cannot argue on equal terms with persons who reject an authority which we venerate. Certainly,

the question of penitence might be brought under the head of moral philosophy, or of social science;¹ but it would then be outside the bounds intended for the present enquiry. The objections we desire to meet are those raised by believers in CHRIST crucified, and in the Church, His Body. We acknowledge the influence of another kind that exists in the world: perhaps we feel sadly our inability to lead opponents into safer paths. But we cannot fight with their weapons now. We must say what the Church teaches, and prove our doctrine from the sacred Scriptures.

This should make our task much easier, because one can hardly imagine that Churchmen, whoever they are, will refuse to own the grief and the mischief of sin. They may prefer not to bring the subject forward, knowing how great the popular dislike is to the sound of the word: and prolonged silence may have no good effect, at last, on their own personal convictions. But this deterioration will be unsuspected by themselves, and, in most cases, very gradual. On the whole, if a man still calls himself a Christian, and confesses his faith by the Creeds, he will not hesitate to adhere to the remission of sins, sincerely and simply.

Can anything remain to dispute about, with one who so believes? He has no desire, as we have none, to close his eyes either to the "goodness" or the "severity of GOD." While firmly convinced that "the wrath of GOD is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," he apprehends also the "precious and exceeding great promises" which have been "granted unto us" in JESUS CHRIST. He and we alike expect to find, in the one and only Gospel, an "epiphany of kindness and love towards man," a ladder set up from earth to heaven, rejoicing angels, a FATHER'S embrace. Is not this enough to make us brethren and friends?

No! One may be thankful if there remains a common intent to accept redemption with its blessings, and to repent and believe the Gospel. But none the less is there a large distaste for that system of penitence which the Church established of

¹ See, for instance, an article on "The Psychology of Conversion," *Church Quarterly*, April, 1903.

old for the use of her children. And this is felt, not merely by those who pretend that human nature has advanced beyond the necessity for self-abasement, but by not a few of the more devout sort, who pray to GOD, and value pious practices, and have a high sense of the obligation of each Christian duty.

What these persons are most opposed to is, always, the intervention of a priest. To that they feel intense dislike, together with a persuasion that it is vain and superfluous, and even derogatory to the pure mercy of GOD in CHRIST. Now, the persuasion, truly, might have some ground for it if penitence could not be kept apart from corruptions in practice, which have little to recommend them. The jealous dislike, however, is at the present moment wholly unreasonable; and it is a pity that good men should allow themselves to be led in this matter by a noisy and ignorant mob. No one is surprised to find the unthinking multitude very fierce and bitter. But the best Evangelicals might surely reflect that Papal aggression has long ceased to be even a bugbear to Englishmen; while the spiritual pretensions of Anglican clergymen nowhere afford cause for alarm. Notwithstanding which, we are constantly being reminded that the ashes of old quarrels are by no means extinct; and that, with very little stirring, they would again burst forth into flames.

Now, surely, most of the old causes of jealousy should be dismissed from consideration. Among them, certainly the fear of Papal aggression. Since Philip II., no European monarch has been willing to lend fleets and armies to reinstate the Pope; and as to spiritual invasion from the Vatican, English Protestantism has been amply strong enough to defend itself these many years. It would be a waste of energy to protest that "the Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this realm of England."¹ There is no echo on these shores to that fretful murmuring of the Pharisees, *venient Romani, et tollent nostrum locum, et gentem*. So that, even if the priest in the confessional were—*per impossibile*—the emissary of a foreign Church, it would matter very little.

For a different reason, since it is wide of our present mark,

¹ Article xxxvii.

I should pass by the hostility of the sects.¹ One hears of a new alliance of "Free Churches"—a thing very desirable in itself, which one hopes may soon become more solid, and less sentimental, than it is at the present time. Possibly we might then witness a general advance on lines of friendly "undenominationalism;" which might, again, as is possible, be unfriendly towards ourselves, though on most accounts a welcome sight. But this is certainly not as yet a thing accomplished. The poor priest may still breathe: he may even wear the "grave-clothes of old superstitions" for a little longer, if he pleases. A revised and anti-sacerdotal Prayer Book has not yet emerged from the dim twilight of conspiracy. Except where politics are concerned, the sects mind their own business.

Then, again, there is no inordinate cruelty in the intentions of *the rich*, towards those whose work is mainly missionary, among the poor. The great plutocrats are often nominally Churchmen; sometimes they are zealous Churchmen; sometimes, but rarely, they are persecutors. Still more rarely are they able to harm the Church by their persecution. These new kings of the earth are not so omnipotent as a certain monarch, whom it was thought "dangerous to tell all that he could do if he chose."² But the fact is, that, for the most part, they have little desire to be obnoxious. Most of them are hurried away by ambition in a direction where the priest, and his cure of souls, are quickly forgotten. And although rich men in all ages may have found repentance a "needle's eye;" and the Stock Exchange is not productive of "mourners" for sin any more than of "poor in spirit" who leave all for CHRIST'S sake; still, the annals of the day abound in exceptions even to this rule. Many of our richer citizens are bestowing their wealth piously and nobly. Many are simple and modest in their conversation;³ who shall say that their hearts are not contrite towards GOD?

¹ The great divisions of Christendom raise enormous obstacles to pastoral work, and to the conversion of souls, both at home and in our Colonies. But the intention of this chapter is to deal only with causes of alienation or opposition among those of our own communion.

² Sir Thomas More's well-known words about Henry VIII.

³ Though not particularly concerned with America, the author cannot

But what are we to think of the attitude of those whom we should most study to conciliate—the “good Low-Churchmen,” as they used to be called?

Alas! there is only one way to describe it. They are thoroughly alienated. They protest that we can have “neither part nor lot” with them, if we are determined to uphold our obnoxious doctrines and practices. And here let us be just, and allow for a trouble which may have arisen from ambiguous language. The Oxford Movement did well by compelling attention to the Prayer Book *as a whole* (as also, what was even more important, to the Bible as a whole); but even the Tractarians were not always agreed on the meaning of certain terms employed, though of cardinal importance. And now, besides the habit so many have of evacuating words of their once-recognised force, one is obliged to allow for really obscure passages, occurring in places where clearness was much to be desired. This applies very much to the penitential statements. For instance, we are taught that CHRIST “hath given power and commandment to His ministers, to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins;” but as to what kind of declaration is meant, and when, and how, and where, the clergyman is to “pronounce,” extreme difference of opinion prevails. The words, as they stand, are not enough to settle the dispute.¹

But then, too, these excellent people are opponents through what one may call the conflict of two good practical aims. Which is it to be, priest or parent? Pious Protestants value highly the sacredness of home-life: they respect the holy bond which unites the several members of a blameless English family. This they think is endangered by the Catholic system of

deny himself the pleasure of emphasising this in the examples of some members of the “Protestant Episcopal Church,” whom he has had the privilege of knowing,

¹ Not much help was afforded by the directions which date from 1661, viz., that this Form should be “pronounced by the priest alone, standing.” The Form was still left, to have its intention judged of by its actual contents; and the opinion is still tenable, that it amounts only to a declaration of God’s promises in the Gospel.

penitence. Every one has heard how a warm regard for domestic ties was a feature of the early Teutonic character. The ancient Germans were noted for their respect for women, unusual among barbarians. But where woman is honoured, the family will gather round her as its centre. Thus, when the light of Christianity had begun to dawn, children were "brought up in the nurture and admonition of the LORD," and taught from early years to prize their father's blessing, and their mother's prayers.

Of course there is a difference now. The Fifth Commandment is not regarded as it used, and the young break away from restraint precisely at that tender age when they would appear to stand in greatest need of direction for their inexperience. Yet exceptions are met with. And moreover, even in cases where fathers and mothers acknowledge inability to guide or control their children, they are still loth to make room for another to take their place. If their own voices are unheeded, they at least will not disturb nature's order by bringing in a stranger. The proper person to keep the family conscience, to encourage the good, and to correct the erring, is the mother, not the priest. Thus the very mention of a confessor is a suggestion of secrets violated, and confidence estranged. Together with acute pain, there is injury to the moral sense. "For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother;" and did not the LORD say so too? Was not that His own precept, never to be broken?

These are for the most part admirable sentiments. The only mistake is in assuming that the priest's influence must be either in flagrant opposition, or else secretly destructive of that of the parent. Assuredly the two may be reconciled; and when the time comes for returning to the subject, we shall hope to show how both have proper parts to fill in the due organisation of CHRIST'S kingdom. At present let us merely note the objection before us, as deserving most respectful attention. By all means let the integrity of home-life be cherished and guarded. Within the family circle, if anywhere, are heard those "words fitly spoken," prompted by purest affection conjoined with prudence, which are like the "golden apple" set in its beautiful

frame of "silver."¹ Against such a fortress as that, truly, "no weapon that is formed shall prosper."

It will suffice to add one more hostile argument from the side of devout Evangelicals. Nothing has contributed so much to an anti-sacerdotal habit of thought, as the persuasion that ministerial absolution raises a barrier between a soul and its Saviour. Thus a man will insist that "his soul is his own;" adding, no doubt, what is by no means a corollary to that, but a far greater truth antecedent to it, namely, that "the LORD saith, All souls are *Mine*." Then, the question is whether he considers enough, that GOD has set helps around for the protection and training of this soul: that as GOD has given them, so he must use them; unless he is content that what he boasts of as his own should be lost to him, utterly and for ever. However, he proceeds to argue that, when CHRIST is the only "Way," no earnest Christian can endure to have that way blocked by CHRIST'S ministers. We have at least free access to CHRIST Himself, and forgiveness through His Blood for the asking. "What need of conference with a fellow-sinner? Did not our Saviour say, Come unto Me, and I will give you rest?"

Now of course that text might very well be compared, as it ought to be, with other passages where our LORD is found to have deputed the care of souls to His apostles and their successors in the Church. But the place for that will be farther on. We are trying here to estimate difficulties under which really pious people labour. For instance, one hears sometimes of persons who have drawn back from confession after practising it for years, because they felt that their longing for a closer union with their Saviour was actually retarded and chilled. It seemed to them that the cause of their disappointment was this intervention of a human counsellor, on whom they had learned to lean too implicitly.² Such persons deserve our sincere com-

¹ Proverbs xxv. 11. "Filagree-work," R.V. margin. The reading of LXX. is *μῆλον χρυσοῦν ἐν ὀρμίσκῳ σαρδίου*, "a necklace of sardine stone." Something, at any rate, very precious and beautiful.

² See a Memoir of Annie Keary, by her sister, p. 164: "She had been meeting Him through a medium, hearing about Him and His will, instead of listening to His voice in her own heart. . . . From that time she discontinued the practice of confession, though she never spoke

passion. Not that we should hesitate to silence their scruples, even while we set their minds at rest. But we should run to meet them, when they plead for an open road to heaven's gate. We should declare ourselves in fullest agreement with their demand that each individual Christian soul should enjoy direct guidance from above. *Audiam quid loquatur in me Dominus Deus, quoniam loquetur pacem in plebem suam, et super sanctos suos, et in eos qui convertuntur ad cor.*¹ Human advisers can neither supersede individual effort, nor stand in the place of Him, the true καρδιογνώστης whose eyes are over the righteous, and His ears open to their prayers. Wherever spiritual life is healthy, it will have been marked by special petitions and mercies: by the opening of the gate by the Beloved Master Himself, to souls whose knocking had been loud indeed to His hearing, but secret and unperceived by neighbours. Nathanael must still be discovered under the fig-tree, apart: Paul must have a voice that none can hear except himself: Mary must sit at the Master's feet while her sister is busied with other cares. This is ever the privilege of earnest souls, the fruit of their baptismal consecration; that they should commune much alone with GOD, having no teacher but the HOLY GHOST, no advocate or mediator but "JESUS CHRIST the righteous."

And when the time comes for speaking on sacramental penitence at greater length, the endeavour will be to show how its proper object is to bring souls to CHRIST, that they may afterwards "taste and see" for themselves. At first, indeed, there will be room for the priest as CHRIST'S minister; but his part will be like that of Andrew, to lead his own brother to JESUS, and then to leave him in His hands. Nor will sacramental penitence be set forth as necessary and indispensable for all alike. Not indispensable, for regular access, to those already in a state of grace; but intended rather for unhappy ones who

against it. . . . She had come to lean too much on an outside conscience." Such scruples are often sincere: though it is also quite possible to deceive oneself. Keble describes a conscience which is—

"Too feeble for confession's smart,
Too proud to bear a pitying eye."

(*The Christian Year*: "Ash Wednesday.")

¹ Ps. lxxxv. 8.

have lost their way, and "forgotten their resting-place."¹ But personal responsibility is neither evaded nor transgressed by repairing on special occasions to officers duly authorised, whom our LORD Himself puts within our reach, and invites us to "receive in His Name."

One ought by all means to deal tenderly with the pious evangelical Protestant. Yet there is a point of contact between his objection and that of the non-Christian reformers of the last chapter. At least, it would seem that both alike are impatient of what would force the mind back upon past shortcomings; and, perhaps, both have much the same way of pleading that we ought, rather, to give our whole attention to the future. For even Evangelicals are, in these days, more inclined to be practical than emotional. They do not talk any longer of submitting to "an inward change which comes through trusting in CHRIST without works,"² nor make that the excuse for indolence. They would rather be useful, and "serve their generation." Then, since CHRIST has paid their debt in full, why should not that debt be banished from recollection? Why should it hinder them at this stage from doing good? Heartily accepting salvation through His merits, they would prove henceforth what a true *μετάνοια* requires of one converted; but they reject *pœnitentia*. Thus they arrive almost at forgetting the ever-present necessity of the Sacrifice of the Death of CHRIST, and the effect which that should have upon a Christian's conception of duty. The idea is simply to do one's best as if nothing had happened. Whereas, if we believe S. Augustine, "It will not suffice to change one's conduct for the better, nor to refrain from wicked actions, unless we also make satisfaction to GOD for what we have done, by penitential sorrow and humble lamentations, and by the sacrifice of a contrite heart, assisted by almsgiving."³ In that sentence, S. Augustine clearly defines the Catholic position.

In short, these good people should not let their wrath wax

¹ Jeremiah l. 6. Special reasons for a more systematic recourse to this ordinance will be suggested in chap. v.

² "A notional religion, sterile and certainly doomed." (See Matthew Arnold's *Last Essays on Church and Religion*.)

³ S. Aug. (Serm. cccli. : *De Pœnitentia*).

hot against us because we insist on first laying a safe foundation for them to build upon. Repentance is a solemn necessity, a work that must not be hurried over.

All that they say about free grace we accept. Christians are agreed that, through the Incarnation of the Eternal Word, man's intercourse with his Maker has been made easy and direct. He now requires no mediator save that One Who took his nature to redeem it. "Whatever the FATHER giveth Me shall come to Me, and him that cometh I will in no wise cast out." And we might seem to extol the Divine mercy most worthily, by reposing our whole trust on the Name that is above every name; setting aside all lower aids and means, and forgetting our labour and trouble in the sweet recollection of Him, our righteousness and full satisfaction. The modern view, which is so practical, which assures us that our LORD has no desire except to set our hands free for work, and forbids to distress ourselves about the past since He has answered to GOD for every claim, seems at first to go no farther than this our common ground of agreement; and it rejoices our hearts by the generous light in which it presents our Blessed Master. "How can we love Him enough, if He thus bears all our grief? if He blots out the sum of legal obligations which we could never fulfil? He, too, who fashions the hearts of all men, and gives to the Anglo-Saxon race a particular character according to His will, has He not prepared them by freedom of soul for that province in the world's necessary service which they are destined to adorn? Who could imagine this thoughtful, progressive, industrious, indomitable people tutored always under a system better suited to children than to grown men? Were the English, so far as spiritual interests went, to 'differ nothing from servants,' though their right place was to be 'lords of all?'"

Ah! but presumption lurks in pleasant speech like this. Confidence in CHRIST ought not anyhow to encourage us in heathenish boasting. Under sentiments such as these one might well write—

ἔσσεται ἡμαρ ὅταν ποτ' ὁλώλῃ Ἴλιος ἱρή.¹

¹ Hector's lament to Andromache (*Iliad* vi. 448), was quoted by

The greatness of England is not ensured by a blind vain-glory—very different from cherishing the virtues with which GOD has endowed our national character. "How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces!"

Besides, our business here is not with the empire, but with the individual conscience; and it is certain that *you and I* cannot have GOD'S blessing without a penitent frame of mind. If we contented ourselves with a little superficial sadness, for what was really grave disobedience, we should not have advanced far without encountering sorrow from some other cause.¹ There seems to be a balance of pleasure and pain, which adjusts itself by degrees, through the accidents of life. Those who refused to be mourners for their transgressions after the precepts of the Church, are sometimes utterly crushed by a sudden bereavement, or the unkindness of treacherous friends. The most joyous souls are those who give thanks all their days for a pardon which they own to have been a huge boon, totally unmerited on their part. And they are in no hurry to forget. S. Peter's bitter tears were dried by his Master's own reassuring presence; but the tradition is constant, that he never slackened penitence for that brief and sudden fall.

One may admit, however, that modern popular aspects of religion are ever so much brighter than the discredited Calvinism of the past. People do not now persist in gathering clouds and darkness around their path, nor make Sundays, especially, dreary to themselves and to all who come near them. One is not so fain to wonder, concerning some of one's acquaintance, whether they can ever have heard of the Resurrection, or the communion of saints, or comfort of the HOLY GHOST. There is certainly more of true eastern sunshine² reflected in their faces, than one used to see there.

Scipio Æmilianus at Carthage, "with melancholy forebodings for the future of Rome." (See How and Leigh's *History of Rome*, p. 253.)

¹ "Nemo secure gaudet, nisi bonæ conscientiæ in se testimonium habeat." (*De Imitat. Christi*, lib. i. cap. 20.)

² S. Aug. (*De Civ. Dei*, lib. xi. cap. 7): "Lucescit et mane fit, cum scientia creaturæ refertur ad laudem dilectionemque Creatoris."

And yet one feels that their tenure of inward peace is, perhaps, precarious. Would that they could welcome a religion in which, after the brief pain of owning faults, comes the immense joy of the Divine acceptance—a joy which “no man taketh from you!”

Yet even without this we need not feel that good men are sundered from us utterly and irrecoverably. We wish indeed that we could overcome their repugnance to a discipline which we believe to be, in its right place, wholesome and necessary, while it is, equally, most merciful and gracious. And there really seems no reason why we should not succeed. But if we fail, we must remember that any distrust of ministerial absolution is a far less evil than wilful unconsciousness of sin. Once or twice in the foregoing pages one has had to point out the danger of approaching that latter abyss, when people have shown themselves too impatient of the sorrowful delays which the Church has been wont to enjoin. But we may be quite sure that those whom we have now in mind intend nothing of the sort; and our hope is to be found with them, sooner or later, at the foot of that Cross, from which He, lifted up, draws all men unto Him.

Indeed, indeed, *they* ought not to be our opponents. Look again at what is the real obstacle to GOD'S truth—that widespread disparagement of the mischief and malice of sin, virtually almost unbelief in sin, which was the chief subject of discussion in our first chapter. How can the practical result be other than evil? Mr. Gladstone is reported to have said, that “the gradual and palpable decline of the sense of sin, in the literature and society of to-day, is the darkest among the many signs now overshadowing the bright and hopeful promise of the future.”¹ It is a serious reflection how, if this be true, the enemy must be recovering ground in Christian England, once “isle of saints,” “other Eden, demi-paradise.”² Steadily, then, and perhaps not very slowly, we glide back towards that inexorable fate of paganism, that “the whole world lies in the evil one.” And is it not

¹ Quoted by Dr. Gott, Bishop of Truro, in a *Pastoral Letter*, A.D. 1903.

² See Shakspeare's *Richard the Second*, Act ii. sc. 1.

indeed paganism, to which we are hastening year by year? What else do missionaries tell us, on whom devolves the necessity of comparing heathen standards with those of a so-called Christian home-country? "The most serious difficulty," writes one, "of all that we encounter in India is an intensely low moral tone, checking healthy progress in well-nigh every direction, and above all blunting the power of conscience and the consciousness of sin, to a degree which is hardly possible to conceive."¹ Where the really inconceivable thing is the injury done to those easterns by contact with what is worse than their own paganism—the selfish luxury and intemperance by which our countrymen, not they, disgrace themselves, and the wholly godless conversation, to which all the idolatries of the heathen world would be preferable.

But enough. There is no use in opening out that vista, which, as it lengthens, carries the eye too far from matters of immediate concern. If we must needs rush into the perplexing problems of the Far East, we shall leave the practical question of repentance for sins done among those of our own race, and in the land of our birth. And even for those whose work calls them abroad, it is best that this subject should be studied first at home. But none the less is Mr. Gladstone's warning justified: the evil of which he speaks is here, felt in many a quiet English family, and by no means confined to one class.² Now and then, a voice is heard "crying in the wilderness." Some popular author takes courage to scourge the prevalent vices; and one may hope that his words do not fall quite unheeded, that his efforts are not altogether fruitless. Unless, indeed, he has made himself the prophet of a hard and sour pessimism, as may too easily happen where the reformer's own heart has not been softened by the sweet balm of penitence.

But the Church alone can provide for her children's need. In her keeping are the leaves of the tree of life which heal:³

¹ From an article by Dr. Lefroy, Bishop of Lahore, in *The East and the West*, April, 1903.

² Except that the upper class is, for obvious reasons, most amenable to his charge of suppressing the mention of sin "in literature and society."

³ See Neale's *Commentary on the first Psalm*, verse 4: "As the fruit signifies works, so the leaves set forth words. The leaves of the tree,

hers the access to Jordan, where one may still "wash and be clean." Every Catholic mind is most deeply convinced of the saving efficacy of these spiritual treasures. Is there no hope of imparting the same assurance to others? Can no common ground be discovered in this controversy on repentance? We have looked at the opposition from the side of national independence, from the independence of the individual, from pride of wealth and high station, from jealousy of priestly influence as felt especially by parents. But surely, wherever earnest Christians are found, in a matter so closely connected with their Saviour's redeeming work, there must be some points of agreement? And are not these the greater points? And will not, therefore, the Church's many voices of supplication rise at last to the FATHER in solemn and tender unison—a chanted psalm without a discord?

Let us think of any of the grand abbey-churches of Western Europe, as we have seen them; perhaps defaced now, or ruinous; still impressive by their association with Catholic worship. Who, while pacing along those aisles, can be unconscious of the spirit that once was present there—a spirit of humble petition to the Great Author of forgiveness? See the broken screen, from which the Saviour once stretched forth His hands, uplifted on the holy rood:—"Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." Listen, as it were, to the echoes of solemn music at Passion-tide, the *Pange lingua*, the *Vexilla Regis*. Observe the brethren in choir, as with bowed heads they recite *Miserere*. Pass on to the high altar at Easter, and receive your soul's peace from the risen CHRIST, as He shows the wounds whereby the price of your redemption was paid. Shall all those memories be revived in vain? Yes, perhaps, in vain. For, to many sincere Christians, those are but old superstitions: to think of their former reign, their vanished influence, draws none nearer to where we are to-day. On the contrary, if they are now abolished, (our opponents would say,) it is well.

the words of Him that spake as never man spake, 'are for the healing of the nations.' His leaf, not leaves; for all the words of CHRIST are comprehended in this one, namely—Love."

Then shall we speak next of hymns that we all love? Surely, in the congregational use of some of those, there is a wonderful power working towards re-union. "When I survey the wondrous Cross:" who among us would wish to alter a single line? yet its author was a Nonconformist. Whoever wrote it, we should say, it is the noblest expression in the English language of that true and genuine emotion, which only a contrite spirit feels in contemplating the Sacred Passion. And still, perhaps, pathetic hymns have had their day. This generation thinks and criticises—it does not feel. If we would discover a force which should "bow the hearts of all men, even as the heart of one man," we must not look to our hymnals to supply it.

But at least the Holy Bible remains. We can, and do, unite ourselves to the thanksgiving of à Kempis, when he exclaims, "Thanks be unto Thee, O LORD JESUS, Thou Light of everlasting Light, for that table of sacred doctrine, which Thou hast prepared for us by Thy servants the prophets and apostles."¹ Give us the Bible: give us the Psalter, and the prophecy of Isaiah, and the story of the Cross, and the words of JESUS which are "spirit and life;" and we shall surely have enough to bring all faithful men with one accord to the Throne of Grace, to intreat for themselves and for all mankind.

It cannot be only among those of one party that there is sympathy with distressed consciences; with souls seeking for pardon and peace, for Divine comfort and uplifting. One should rather say that the pity for them is boundless, among all our earnest people. And if traditional teaching is viewed with suspicion, by all means let us come with open minds to the study of Scripture itself. That is safe at least to begin with. If Puritan individualism is to have a free hand anywhere, let it be in searching out a path for the soul's return to GOD. Later, we shall have to think of rules laid down by saints, and become "men under authority." Utterly to reject such helps would be folly indeed. But it has been well said that "historical considerations do not weigh with men against their own impressions;" and it is really best that they

¹ See *The Imitation of Christ*, book iv. chap. xi. 4.

should form their own convictions first, and give them full and sufficient trial. Therefore, though "the world could not contain the books that have been written" on penitence, let us put all aside for the present, and trust ourselves simply to the precious words which stand in the sacred narrative; only expecting from our brother-Christians reasonable treatment, common sense, and kindness.

"If in anything ye are otherwise minded, even this shall GOD reveal unto you: only, whereunto we have already attained, by that same rule let us walk."

For the subject, therefore, of the next chapter, we will take the witness which the sacred Scriptures bear to the origin of penitence, and to its growth from the beginning to the fulness of time.

CHAPTER III.

The Development of Penitence, before and after Christ.

A VERY slight study is all that is here intended of some of the penitential aspects of ancient religious thought. Chief and most important for our present purpose is the preparation of Israel. Other nations may have been actuated in part by the same hopes and fears. But in the case of Israel we know that we have a people taught of GOD, first to understand sin by revelation from Himself, then to acknowledge their guilt by means of ordinances of His own appointment, and finally to preserve in prophecy the expectation of that Redeemer who should at last be sent "to bless them, in turning away every one of them from their iniquities."

However, Penitence is much older than the Mosaic covenant. From the beginning of the world, men must have had earnest thoughts about sin and its consequences. While yet the idea of covenanted mercies in any shape was strange and dim, Enoch stands forth "an example of repentance to all generations."¹ We, indeed, are now so used to speak of the soul's new birth of the HOLY GHOST, that we hardly realise conversion apart from baptismal regeneration: even in preaching to the heathen, we find it most natural to begin with our Saviour's word to Nicodemus. But the two are quite distinct. Most true it is that, since CHRIST came, the doctrine of repentance has stood out in firm and clear outline, as it never did before. Presented to mankind in JESUS' Name, it wears a gracious and tender aspect, enlisting our deepest affections and strongest hopes, even more than it compels our fear. But, wherever the human

¹ Eccclus. xliv. 16.

conscience had not been asleep, men were wont to be moved to sorrow for their own wrong-doing. Though conscience may not be always the faithful echo of the Divine Judgment, it is at least the serious inward response of a rational being, prompted by the felt presence of an all-holy living GOD. According to the notions that men have entertained of GOD, has ever been their sense of sin. If they made Him one of a number, or degraded Him to a vague all-pervading principle, conceptions of that kind would have little effect upon their view of right and wrong. The virtues of Greece and Rome were not formed on the pattern of Olympus, nor were evil-doers deterred by the wrath of Apollo. If, on the other hand, GOD was held to be the one living Person, supreme in power, truth, and righteousness, His children would confess themselves accountable, and lament their misdeeds before Him, in the way that we are familiar with in the Psalms of David.¹

Yet it is more than possible that, even in a pantheist or polytheist, conscience exists to some extent; so that the Divinity which he acknowledges, even though to him nameless, is able to appeal to his moral choice, and to affect him with dread, shame, or inward peace, as the case may be, in view of a certain definite course of action.² There can be little doubt that such ideas have been "common to man" from the very first, however dull of soul he might be through ignorance, however elated by philosophy, however little illumined through study of inspired Scriptures. "We make our appeal," said Tertullian, "to souls simple, rude, unpolished, untutored, be they taken from the street, market, or weaver's shop, or from whence you will."³ But he might just as well have included other souls by no means unpolished, highly accomplished in secular science. "Knowledge puffeth up," but it does not quickly make one deaf to GOD'S inward warnings. It

¹ As in Psalms xxxviii. and xl.; or, especially, see Ps. xc.

² Among the Brahmanists, however, the moral sense is weak, and their asceticism has no penitential intention. Those ancient religions which recognise a kind of Divine sonship in man, proceed on the theory of emanation, and ascribe no true personality to the supreme Being. Yet even the Egyptians sometimes prayed to Amon as Father.

³ See Tertull. *De Testim. Animæ*.

was not even necessary, for the purpose of penitence, that secular studies should have been tempered and chastened by acquaintance with the Divine law of righteousness. Certainly, "by the law is the knowledge of sin;" and the Ten Commandments were regarded with fear, because, when their lawgiver came down with shining face to deliver them, Israel felt that he was bearing them direct from GOD—"written with the Finger of GOD." But not only Moses, who had seen the Divine glory from the rocks of Sinai, could "persuade men" by that "terror." Whether with or without the written law, with or without awful visions and revelations, conscience would exert its sway. It could not be destroyed, because its "fresh springs" were in GOD: from GOD it came: it was (says Jeremy Taylor) "the vicar of GOD." Its admonitions were the fulfilment of a Divine promise, implied in the original fashioning after the Divine image.¹ And, of course, its witness might often be most consoling. "If our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward GOD."² Conscience (said the author of *De Interiori Domo*) is the peaceful home in which one may rest, after service loyally rendered in the great warfare with evil.

On the contrary, wherever there was an accusing conscience, men felt that GOD would punish them for their wicked deeds. They acknowledged that they had forfeited the right of existence. For them, no longer the sun shone, or the rain brought forth fruits from the earth. When Ezekiel declared with solemn emphasis that the sinning soul should die, he enunciated no new doctrine. New might be the sound of those added words,³ that children should no more be included in their father's ruin: but all knew already that the *actual offender* deserved no less than to die for his trespass. Punishment was not thought of as corrective and remedial, in those early days. It was simply the removal of a barren tree from the space which it cumbered. Was not that the original sentence upon Adam—death for disobedience?

Yet the issues of life and death were in the Creator's hand, and His creatures could rest in the assurance that He "hated

¹ See Jerem. xxxi. 33, for a later more explicit statement.

² 1 S. John iii. 21: compare Acts xxiv. 16.

³ Ezek. xviii. 20.

nothing that He had made.”¹ He was able indeed to destroy, but He was also “the LORD by whom we escape death,”² Thus the offender’s sorrow, even under sharpest stings of conscience, or heaviest apprehension of doom, was never quite without hope. To a GOD long-suffering and gracious there might be room to appeal. Nor would the appeal be in vain: the sinner’s days might still be prolonged in the land of his inheritance.

The first thought of fallen man was to propitiate by the vicarious oblation of sacrifice. A life for a life. To us, for whom the sufficient answer to every alarm is in “the offering of the Body of JESUS CHRIST once for all,” it is natural to depreciate the importance of the primitive idea. There must be many days of ours—days of active, thrilling interest—in which we scarcely realise that we live this earthly life *only* “because He lives,” who first died for us. Yet that is the simple fact. He is “the Saviour of the body,” and without Him we could have nothing to urge against the justice of immediate punishment for sin.³ But what we now forget, was much more present to the consciousness of them of old time. They felt the decree of death hanging over them, and the sacrificial system was their most obvious means of averting an untimely doom. At all events, the experiment seemed reasonable to be made. Something else was to shed its blood, that so their own might not be required: *that* something to be taken from property which they owned—a costly offering, freely surrendered to the awful Supreme Being. Opposite sides have been assumed on the question whether the institution of sacrifice was from heaven, or of men. In reality, this is unimportant. For whether the first altar was, or was not, reared in obedience to a Divine command, we know GOD accepted the first sacrifice made with shedding of blood, and pronounced Abel, the faithful offerer, “righteous in respect of his gifts.”⁴ Very early, too, was

¹ Wisdom xi. 24: compare Deut. xxxiv. 39.

² Psalm lxviii. 20.

³ See Bishop Butler (*Analogy*, part ii. chap. 3): “Men have no right to either life or property, but what arises from the grant of GOD: when this grant is revoked, they cease to have any right at all in either.” This is quoted by James Mozley (*Old Testament Lectures*, p. 31).

⁴ Heb. xi. 4: (ἐμαρτυρήθη εἶναι δίκαιος, μαρτυροῦντος ἐπὶ τοῖς δώροις αὐτοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ).

introduced the idea, that men might be reconciled, and live together in concord through partaking solemnly of a sacrificial feast; and this custom, in its turn, enjoyed the Divine favour and benediction. Thus, through the blood of the slain victim, a covenant was sealed with earth and with heaven; after which, the once guilty sinner might return to dwell in a peaceful habitation, undismayed by fear of coming evil. Such was the primitive idea; which, we may suppose, exerted a stronger hold over the imagination, as experience showed their GOD appeased by the regular tribute of sacrifices by sinful man.¹

What, then, did their experience really amount to? What were the measures of that Divine forgiveness, which infused peace into the little-instructed conscience of the ancient world? Perhaps the safest opinion is that GOD, while putting away the sins of those who repented honestly, was not understood to promise much beyond escape from present death, and continuance of good days on the earth.² Some of His elect would be taught already, by Him who "spake by the prophets," to "see

¹ The view now commonly entertained is, that the slaying of victims in ancient times was either to mark the slayer's initiation into a state of ceremonial perfection, or else (where numbers partook of a sacrificial feast), to promote tribal unity and patriotic feeling. Even in considering the Levitical sacrifices, neither Bishop Westcott nor Dr. Paterson allow much space to the idea of propitiation; while Dr. Edersheim declares that "Rabbinic tradition found no place for the Priestly Office of the Messiah, not feeling the need of deliverance from sin." None the less, the Epistle to the Hebrews must be our guide to the real intention of the Levitical sacrifices. Nor can the desire for remission have been altogether absent from other offerings, that were not within the covenant; they expressed the longing of guilt-laden souls for the Divine mercy. Dr. Swete, indeed, says (*Hastings' Dict. "HOLY SPIRIT"*), "The conception of a CHRIST-Priest was entirely wanting, till it presented itself to the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews." But, surely, the great conception was *latent* in much of the pre-Christian ritual?

² It is a great deal more than we can be sure of, that God never ruled His ancient people by means of temporal rewards and punishments. We should then have to set aside the long-accepted significance of David's glorious reign, and the doctrine not merely of the Psalms but of the Ten Commandments. Mr. W. R. Inge, in his *Faith and Knowledge*, Sermon V., is content with refuting the theory of temporal retribution "in its crude form," and showing how soon that came to be superseded by what was truer and better. In fact, the theory still survives, and enters into the criticism of Christian times. If not many now acquiesce in contemporary verdicts on the deaths of Arius and Julian, a large number agree cordially with S. Gregory Nazianzen's Oration on the triumph of Athanasius.

the day of CHRIST,"¹ and to form hopes of a better life beyond the grave. But, however this may have been in individual cases, one must think that the popular outlook was much nearer and narrower; and that temporal blessings were what the greater number desired and cared for. If they had thought more of spiritual profit, or of eternal life to be won, it seems unlikely that rest and satisfaction would have been found in that old routine of sacrifices.

We note, accordingly, that, as the education of the human race advanced, sacrifices fail to satisfy the longings of the troubled conscience. Our sense of sin must depend upon the worthiness of our conception of the holy GOD. He Himself is the law which His children obey: their heavenly parentage requires that the father's image stamped upon the son should be a Divine image.² Thus, the more He reveals of His own perfections, the greater is our responsibility before Him. We cannot hide ourselves from eyes which are "in every place, beholding the evil and the good." We must walk "in the light of His countenance," which illumines our path wherever we go. Nor does His seeing us issue merely in some angelic succour to the sore distressed. That is not excluded. But the increasingly familiar thought has been of a "righteous GOD trying the very hearts and reins"—a FATHER searching to find His own likeness in our souls.

So, then, penitence has gradually become a deeper thing than at first, and the craving for atonement is no longer to be met by oblations of the firstlings of flock or herd.

For a time the terrors of awakened consciences might be dispelled by either increasing the quantity, or improving the quality, of what was offered. "Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams?" Or, if not, "Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the

¹ S. John viii. 56. It would be hard not to see a hope of resurrection in Psalms xvi. and xvii: yet one has to consider, on the other side, passages like Ps. vi. 5, Job x. 22, and Isaiah xxxviii. 18. David's own personal hope is not plainly declared by his words in 2 Sam. xii. 23.

² The Divine image must have been apprehended by the writer of Gen. ix. 6; and was it not cherished too by the psalmist who described man as "made a little lower than the Elohim?" There was a true royalty even in fallen man: he was not a mere *roi dépossédé*, as Pascal calls him.

sin of my soul ? ” In rejecting both of these, the line taken by the Prophet Micah is precisely the same as Samuel’s, that “to obey is better than sacrifice.” But it does not meet the sinner’s original difficulty. To us Christians Micah’s preference for obedience should be useful and edifying, because amendment of life is really possible, under those large measures of grace to which we have access in JESUS CHRIST our Saviour;¹ and amendment of life is the crown and consummation of penitence. Yet, even so, an amended future cannot atone for a guilty past. That has to be dealt with first. The passage in Micah, therefore, is interesting to us at the present moment chiefly, or only, because it shows fallen man making passionate efforts to arrive at peace with GOD, and shows at the same time how unavailing those efforts were. It might be more to bring a hecatomb, than a single sheep or bullock ; and to offer a darling child to be slain might, indeed, be very much more, but still, it was not enough. For, as men began to reflect on the nature of that immortal soul which GOD had formed within them, they saw, first, that a man’s superiority over other creatures must consist in his exercise of reason and free-will, which conferred upon him a responsible position, from which he could not recede. Next, they perceived that sin is no less than a revolt, of the said human reason and freewill, against that supreme intelligence and sovereign will which are GOD’S. Wherefore, there can be no atonement, though made with shedding of blood, unless the reasonable soul and will of the victim consent to the offering brought. The victim must not only be led to the altar step ; he must of his own accord lay down his life.

Thus many have supposed that Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac merited approval, not merely because the father “did not withhold his only son,” but because Isaac himself made no resistance when he was bound and stretched on the wood. In a less degree one cannot but think that GOD took pleasure in those historic examples, that are familiar, of voluntary surrender

¹ Compare S. Aug. (*Prop. ad Rom.* xviii.): “Gratia vero efficit, ut non tantum velimus recte facere, sed etiam possimus ; non viribus nostris, sed Liberatoris auxilio, qui nobis etiam perfectam pacem in resurrectione tribuat ; quæ pax perfecta bonam voluntatem consequitur.”

to death: for instance, heroes of the old Roman republic.¹ One thing, however, always detracted from their merit. They did not die as penitents.² They did not acknowledge their own and their country's chief need. Nor is it likely that Isaac had that motive, except very imperfectly.

True sorrow for sin could only be developed as the belief gained ground, that GOD was not only the enthroned King, Almighty and omniscient, jealous of His rights, and punishing the guilty with death, but also a Father who loved mankind as His own offspring, and desired their highest welfare. The mercy and long-suffering of a tender parent towards His erring children, were what called forth that responsive affection which at last acquired the name of contrition—the “broken heart which GOD will not despise.” The Hebrew prophets and psalmists are so full of this contrition as to prove that, although not perfectly exhibited till CHRIST came, its germ, at least, could be and was produced under the old dispensation. Those “controversies” of Jehovah with His people were nothing else but earnest pleadings of past favours on His side, to which Israel was to listen with deep pain, and self-abasement. Their intention was not so much to shake the sinner's heart with fear, as that he should “mourn sore, like a dove,” for all the foul ingratitude of which he had been accused. Contrition

¹ Or the famous Greek examples, Codrus and Iphigenia, to whom S. Ambrose alludes (*In S. Luc. lib. v.*). They were indications, he says, of a tendency towards something nobler and better, to come hereafter:—“Non in principiis perfecta quæruntur; sed de principiis ad ea quæ perfecta sunt pervenitur.” Yet the stories are grand enough as we find them:—

... ὦ πάτερ, πᾶραιμι σοι,
τοῦμόν δὲ σῶμα τῆς ἐμῆς ὑπὲρ πατρὸς
καὶ τῆς ἀπάσης Ἑλλάδος γαλας ὑπὲρ
θῦσαι διδωμ' ἐκούσα πρὸς βωμόν θεᾶς.

(Eurip. *Iphig. in Aul.*, 1551, etc.)

² Compare the following lines from Browning's *Paracelsus*:—

“I seemed to long
At once to trample on, yet save mankind;
To make some unexampled sacrifice
In their behalf, to wring some wondrous good
From heaven or earth for them, to perish, winning
Eternal weal in the act; as who should dare
Pluck out the angry thunder from its cloud,
That, all its gathered flame discharged on him,
No storm might threaten summer's azure sleep.”

was not too strong a word for the sorrow of children, owning themselves unworthy of Him who had chosen all their tribes, and called Israel "His son, His firstborn."¹

Obedience was better than sacrifice; a contrite spirit was at least more necessary, for fallen men, than either. But could even contrition avail the sinner for atonement? Suppose it to have been manifested by a most generous and fearless acceptance of death, the willing self-chastisement of a brave and honest spirit, would the victim in that case have "delivered his brother?" would he even have saved his own soul?

Possibly, such really glorious deeds might have satisfied an inexorable conscience, if the hope of appeasing GOD had been kept down to the limit with which it began. The self-sacrifice of Leonidas and his four thousand, or of Judas the Maccabee,² might have seemed to have wrought some kind of expiation of their countries' guilt, if subsequent victories, and the re-establishment of peace, could be sufficient tokens of Divine approval. But in a more thoughtful age, material prosperity could not any longer be either the supreme assurance of GOD'S favour, or the best of what was desired. If GOD was indeed a FATHER, most loving, tender, and gracious, He must surely intend to keep, one by one, these souls that He had formed for Himself, and to render them worthy of His choice. Then, what could man do to secure these spiritual blessings? or to acknowledge them when received? The attraction, by which devout souls were impelled towards an Infinite Being who had declared His love for each and for all of them, would be checked by a deepening apprehension lest their sins should have made them unfit to stand before Him. If He was, indeed, minded to "accept them"—that is, themselves, not their gifts—"as a whole burnt-offering,"³ there must first be a thorough cleansing made of these guilty hearts. And for that, nothing that they could propose to do was sufficient. The very self-abasement of their contrition only added to their consciousness of being weighed down by the old transgressions.

Nothing was sufficient for such a need. Sacrifices could not rid those who brought them of their guilt. Contrition

¹ Exod. iv. 22.

² See 1 Macc. ix. 1-23.

³ Wisdom iii. 6.

could not undo the past, though it might appeal, not in vain, to the pity of an Almighty FATHER. Prayer itself was felt to be of little avail. It is true that "the practice of prayer has been, from the first, coextensive with the idea of religion: wherever man has believed a higher power to exist, he has assumed that he can enter into converse with such a power."¹ It is also true that "the purest, loftiest, most passionate forms of prayer occur in the Psalter;" and that these were composed while men still laboured under the old disabilities. Yet one can hardly think that such prayers provided them with a free way of escape. "O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come." But, after beginning thus, the psalmist seems to check himself—"Iniquities prevail against me." The incense in the Temple symbolised a sweetness of filial intimacy to which human nature dared not yet aspire; and the holy men who, on stated occasions, "called on the Name of the LORD," were intercessors for a people "of unclean lips," who for the most part did not pray for themselves.² Or if sometimes, in some unusual emergency, a "spirit of supplication was poured"³ more largely upon Israel; if at a prophet's bidding the multitude "took with them words, and turned to the LORD, rendering as bullocks the offering of their lips;"⁴ it does not appear, even then, that more was proposed than a readmission to the terms of the Mosaic covenant. The high and holy aim of the fifty-first psalm was exceptional. No doubt its author, as a bright star before the sunrise, repented truly to the saving of his soul. But it is scarcely likely that such an inward spiritual change as is contemplated there, could have been understood, or experienced in full, before CHRIST came. Temporal blessings apart, the last word of the praying Church could only, then, have been, "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified."

¹ See Liddon's *Elements of Religion*, lect. v. pp. 167, 168.

² In Joel ii. 15, etc., though the assembly includes all classes, the priests finally intercede. Solomon's dedication, however, does certainly contemplate each Israelite's praying for himself. (1 Kings viii. 38.)

³ Zech. xii. 10 (where, however, we are apt to find allusions to that compunction which arises from contemplation of the Passion).

⁴ Hosea xiv. 2.

Thus it was that the penitential yearnings of mankind was satisfied by the Sacrifice of CHRIST the SON of GOD. "For what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, GOD, sending His own SON in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the ordinance of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." The more GOD's love was revealed to fallen man, the more impossible it proved for him to respond to that, unless through a Representative of his race who should be absolutely pure, as well as entirely willing to bear the punishment which sinners had incurred.¹ This could be, and was, effected by the self-oblation of One in whom sinless humanity was united to the infinite power of Eternal Godhead. Here, in the perfect Manhood, were obedience most exact and full, self-surrender most generous to a cruel death: a spirit of prayer such as the FATHER loved to answer, and even the contrition which He will not despise. For CHRIST'S were the sorrow and shame that only one innocent can offer, mourning for others' sins, Himself impeccable. Here, again, in the Eternal Godhead, was power to embrace the whole human family, and to bring all mankind, as one, within the virtue of His sacred Passion and redeeming Death. "A man dies for his people, a king dies for his nation, but the highest of all mysteries is that a GOD can die for GOD, and for that which He loves."²

Some have ventured to speak of our Blessed LORD as Himself a penitent.³ In the sense they intended, this may be true; for did He not "bear our griefs and carry our sorrows?" His was the perfect contrition, because it was altogether unselfish, and the loving reparation which it offered to the FATHER'S glory was unchecked by any memory of personal disloyalty. Still, penitence is generally taken to be the punishment of self for one's *own* sins; and our Blessed LORD could not be so punished, although, when on earth, He repeatedly allowed Himself to be included among those who, in the popular estimation, had that debt to pay.⁴ On the contrary, both

¹ See Ps. xl. 6-8; and Heb. vii. 26, 27. Also Heb. x.

² See *The Last Days and Words of Père Gratry*, pp. 73, 75.

³ For example, the late Dr. R. C. Moberly.

⁴ See, for instance, S. Matt. iii. 6; 13-15.

S. Peter and S. John insist strongly that in Him was no sin. For indeed, if there had been, He was not perfect Man, the union of His human nature with the Godhead could not exist, and He was not the Saviour of the world. This difficulty has been perceived by those who ascribe penitence to JESUS CHRIST; but they think that, however certain it is that He never sinned, He may yet have been conscious of capacities for sinning; and that He "judged sin, as a penitent judges it, within Himself."¹ No doubt, the devout mind of the eminent writer here quoted will have succeeded in reconciling his theory with the absolute and inviolable "truth" of the LORD'S moral attitude, throughout His earthly condition. Yet, on the whole, it seems most prudent not to adopt the theory. It is not Scriptural;² it is liable to be misunderstood: and one may doubt whether, even with safeguards, it can be received as strictly orthodox.³ For our sakes, JESUS was a Man of sorrows; but in His soul's inner life the Son of Man was "in heaven;" holding in secure possession that joy which His spotless purity derived from the influx of the HOLY SPIRIT, every moment that He breathed. It was not as a penitent that He appeared at the Transfiguration. Nor even at the Jordan; as His forerunner well knew, spite of appearances to the contrary.

But what our LORD did was, by the infinite merits of His atoning sacrifice, to make the penitence, which we owed, acceptable. If He could not acknowledge actual guilt for sins which He had not committed, He yet made them His own by the love

¹ See Moberly's *Atonement and Personality*, p. 110.

² For we should remember that passages like Lamentat. i. 12-15, have no proper, but only a secondary application to our Saviour. The Scriptural language is, "God made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf." (2 Cor. v. 21.)

³ For instance, does it harmonise well with this of S. Leo? "In salvandis omnibus per crucem Christi communis erat voluntas Patris et Filii; nec ulla poterat ratione turbari quod ante æterna sæcula et misericorditer erat dispositum, et incommutabiliter præfinitum." Therefore, says this Father, when JESUS prays that the Cup may pass from Him, He assumes the voice of our nature, "et causam agit fragilitatis et trepidationis humanæ." S. Leo would certainly not have said that our LORD felt within Him a capacity for declining the Cup. Possibly he might have considered such an expression admissible, but he would not have used it. (See S. Leo's 7th Sermon on the Passion.)

and pity wherewith He embraced their consequences, suffering these to be visited upon Himself. Not merely was He manifested "in likeness of sinful flesh,"¹ but being found in fashion as a Man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. Yea, He bare our sins in His own Body unto that tree; and so, as the apostle feared not to write, "GOD made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of GOD in Him." Here was that worthy and willing victim whom the consciences of sinners had looked for, to present to a justly offended Maker. Here was a love which took to itself not angels but the whole of our fallen race. And here were that "power and wisdom of GOD," without which not even our being able to "preach CHRIST crucified" would have carried peace and salvation.

"The offering of CHRIST once made is perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world, both original and actual."² But it is more. "Therefore," He said, "doth the FATHER love Me, because I lay down My life, *that I may take it again.*" Now, when He takes it again, He, rising from the dead, bestows on His redeemed a new birth, and a life unto sanctification through the Spirit. "I live, and ye shall live." The new life in CHRIST is what Christians contemplate, at every moment of access by faith to the precious doctrine of repentance. It is not merely that they hope for the removal of a burden, or the cancelling of a sentence of wrath. They hope, from the very first, for that wonderful inward renewal which is to result, so we are told, in "the liberty of the glory of the children of GOD." In short, penitence now takes its place among the Christian sacraments, "extensions of the Incarnation" and earnestings of a blessed immortality. Christians repenting have behind them the new birth in Baptism; before them are all the privileges of the holy Eucharistic Feast.

We should observe, that the Blessed Sacrament of CHRIST'S Body and Blood, being the highest means of grace, and the

¹ Rom. viii. 3. What our LORD assumed was merely *ὁμοίωμα* inasmuch as the flesh which He wore had the same appearance as that which men generally make the instrument of sin (*σάρξ ἁμαρτίας*), but that it was real human flesh is proved by 1 S. John iv. 2. (See Dr. Salmon's account of Docetism, in *Dict. of Christian Biography*.)

² Art. xxxi.

sum of spiritual blessings has, itself also, a penitential aspect.¹ Chiefly, because in it we commemorate and continue the oblation of the Lamb once slain for the sins of the whole world. It is a thought common to some of the Fathers, and to ancient Liturgies, that, in these mysteries, CHRIST is presented as slain; or, even, that He comes to submit anew to a real, though not a carnal, mactation.² The language of our Prayer Book is more guarded, but the meaning not far different: for we speak of "continuing a perpetual memory of that precious death," whereby He made ("by His one oblation of Himself once offered"), "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world." The Church's intention, in assembling before the Christian altar, is to plead for renewal of that pardon which CHRIST has merited for us, of which we ever stand in need. If CHRIST is really with us there—if His living Flesh and Blood are actually present—it cannot be but that we shall find in Him the open Fountain of Mercy. Whatever else our King may be, in the majesty of His risen life, He is certainly still the Saviour of sinners; and where can we so truly be with Him as here, in this Memorial which Himself makes, our Priest and Advocate with the FATHER throughout all ages? "I will not leave you desolate; I come to you." Surely the words are fulfilled in Holy Communion, and to penitents, the "weary and heavy laden," with a peculiar gracious completeness.

Prominent also, however, in Holy Communion is the idea of reconciliation and restitution of privileges. Something like that had been the intention of the Levitical peace-offerings, when the people ate and drank before the LORD their GOD,"³ whose anger had been turned away by their repentance. The

¹ This is missed by those who think that the end of man is to be attained through purification of *intellect only*. "Clement's teaching concerning the Holy Eucharist is singularly obscure." (Dr. Swete, *Dict. Chr. Biogr.* "HOLY GHOST.")

² See the Liturgy of S. James: *συνησάτω πάσα σὰρξ βρωτὴν . . . ὁ γὰρ Βασιλεὺς . . . χριστὸς ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν προέρχεται σφαγιασθῆναι καὶ δοθῆναι εἰς βρώσιν τοῖς πιστοῖς*. See also the bold metaphor employed by S. Gregory Nazianzen (Ep. clxxi., *ad Amphilocheum*): *ἀλλ' ὦ θεοσεβέστατε, μὴ κατόκνει καὶ προσεύχεσθαι καὶ πρεσβεῖν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, ὅταν λόγῳ καθέλκης τὸν Λόγον, ὅταν ἀναμάκτω τομῇ σῶμα καὶ αἷμα τέμνης δεσποτικῶν, φωνὴν ἔχων τὸ ἐξίφως*.

³ See Exod. xxiv. 5-12.

terms of their covenant were by that token understood to be renewed: "the LORD would feed them with the heritage of Jacob their father; for the mouth of the LORD had spoken it."¹ But the Christian's sacrificial Feast is no mere symbol or token: no sign of temporal goods restored, but an actual participation of union with the Divine life. "Draw near with faith, and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort." The prodigal returns from his wandering to be fed and refreshed by his father's bounty: he receives the first robe, and a place of honour at a splendid banquet. When that parable is explained, the meaning is seen to be that Holy Communion not only seals to the penitent his pardon, but satisfies his hunger with Bread in which is everlasting life—that great gift of which "the blood of the Cross" was the price.

It is as impossible to separate the Divine forgiveness from these eternal hopes flowing therefrom, as it is to make the CHRIST who died a different person from Him who rose again. One can see, then, what an immense flood of new light the Cross has shed upon the old primeval doctrine of repentance: how for each disquieting doubt there is now a remedy, for each dim guess into the future there is now a strong uplifting on the wings of dauntless confidence, whenever the Name of JESUS is called to mind by Christian penitents. Before, men trusted—and yet hardly trusted—that by sacrifices duly offered they might obtain immunity from punishment, a prolonging of days on the earth, victory over their enemies, peaceful times. Since CHRIST came, they have known that He who justifies, also glorifies; that the shedding of that precious Blood not only atones for sin, but sanctifies through the Spirit; not only sanctifies through the Spirit, but opens the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.

Corresponding to this change of view, the ancient sacrifices have given place to that solemn commemoration of CHRIST'S Death which, while undoubtedly retaining a penitential character, is, as we have seen, to be regarded rather as the sum of spiritual blessings and pledge of highest glory. It is, therefore, to Christians a *sacrificium laudis*: in its primary intention,

¹ Isaiah lviii. 14.

one with that oblation on Calvary which is their only confidence of salvation, but yet most truly festal, and fit to be celebrated with thankful and exulting hearts. Not a time, this, for wearing sackcloth and putting ashes on the head.¹ Rather, by a wise selection, rejoicing psalms have been thought suitable for the sinner's approach to a reconciled GOD.² It seems probable, indeed, that, in the beginning of the Christian Church, the tendency was to forget the pain of penitence in the triumph of our LORD'S Resurrection. So, at Jerusalem, as we read, "they lifted up their voice to GOD with one accord;" praising Him for what "His hand and counsel had foreordained to be done" in that city to His Holy Child JESUS, and confidently entreating that CHRIST'S Death and Resurrection might be followed by signs and wonders wrought through His Name. And for several centuries—how significant is this!—the regular aim of Christian art was to exhibit JESUS as the Good Shepherd, leading His flock to bright fields of Paradise. Not yet was it thought desirable that, in every house of prayer where knees were bowed in that dear Name, the most conspicuous symbol should always be His bitter Cross, with its memories of life laid down in anguish for our sakes—laid down innocent for us guilty, that we might be saved from the darkness and despair of our helpless fall.

Could it be right for the Church to preserve always a jubilant tone in her worship? Certainly; He had said to His disciples, "Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one taketh away from you." And so far as the Holy Eucharist comprises whatever is best in our approach to GOD through all time, one would say that there never ought to be the least abatement in the strain of high thanksgiving. "With angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify Thy glorious Name." It is true that the Holy Eucharist represents the oblation on Calvary; and the oblation on Calvary fulfilled the types of the sin and burnt-

¹ On all days of penitence and mourning the Greek Church uses only the Mass of the Presanctified; not the full Liturgy, because the consecration is a joyful act. (See Hefele, vol. ii. E.T. p. 320.)

² E.g., the 84th and 43rd psalms; commonly recommended for use by the celebrant.

offerings, as well as the sacrifices of peace-offerings. But it is also evident that, whereas in the Sacred Passion thanksgiving was less prominent than propitiation, at the Christian altar there is much less of pleading for the forgiveness of sins; while the Church puts all her force of love into that tribute of praise, which neither man nor angel could bring at the time when the crucifixion was enacted, but which we now confess to be at all times "very meet, right, and our bounden duty."

But this cannot exhaust the whole obligation of penitence; even for those baptised into CHRIST'S Resurrection, and walking in the light of the Easter sun. For we should remember that, although the great Eucharistic oblation may include in its loving purpose all mankind (as one would gather from 1 Tim. ii. that it does¹), it is emphatically the offering of the pure in heart; and those who bring it must be, themselves, in a state of grace. If rites of purification were enjoined on GOD'S ancient people before they could renew the covenant by sacrifice, much more must Christians take heed how they draw near to the awful Table and Cup of the LORD.² "Let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup. For he that eateth and drinketh, eateth and drinketh judgment unto himself, if he discern not the body. If . . . unworthily, he shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the LORD." So, then, if any of CHRIST'S redeemed have fallen into serious sin after baptism, though their desire is to return to their LORD, and be fed at His Table, they cannot render this duteous service without a previous cleansing of heart and conscience. Unhappily, such lapses do occur. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." There is still grave risk that men might present themselves at GOD'S altar lacking, as it were, the wedding-garment; deserving rather of His just judgment to be consigned to "the outer darkness."

It follows from what has been said, that penitence still retains some of the features belonging to pre-Christian

¹ See 1 Tim. ii. 1: παρακαλῶ . . . ποιεῖσθαι δεήσεις, . . . εὐχαριστίας, ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀνθρώπων. (Compare *υψ.* 3 and 4.)

² See 1 Cor. x. 14-22: S. Chrysostom insists that communicants must be "eagles," able to gaze on the glorified πτώμα. (Hom. xxiv. in 1 Cor.)

times: which are, indeed, unalterable, while we are mortal men, liable to temptation, and prone to fall. We have traced the wonderful progress of moral enlightenment; we have seen the conscience awakened by degrees to a sense of the holiness and justice of Him who made us for Himself; and we have marked the influence of fear, moving souls to discover some vindictive penalty which might be accepted by Him as atonement for the sinner. We saw that, in proportion to worthier conceptions of GOD as a most loving FATHER, higher hopes would be entertained of what His pardon might effect; and yet, that these in their turn would melt away before an overwhelming shame and sorrow, equally the fruit of a clearer perception of the purposes of GOD for man. Then came the revelation of "peace with GOD, through our LORD JESUS CHRIST," and by the Sacrifice of Calvary; and we understood how, through those unexhausted merits, pardon leads by a straight course to sanctification, and a climax in eternal glory. Yet, after every advance of Christian hope, the fact remains that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of GOD;" and the voices of the Hebrew prophets—nay, even the Levitical sacrifices—have many lessons still to teach us.

We want something still, to answer to the prophet's biddings to a national repentance (sadly neglected in our own day); and, besides, we want individual cleansing from particular faults, such as was aimed at by the ancient ceremonies of the sin and trespass offering. Now these wants are fully met by the intention of the Catholic Church. If at the beginning there was too great eagerness to cultivate only that "living hope" into which Christians were said to be "begotten again by the resurrection of JESUS CHRIST from the dead"—as if they already held possession of the "inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, which was reserved for them in heaven"—it was not long before they settled down to a sober view of life's dangers and failures, and gave again to penitence that important place which is demanded for it by human infirmity. Our Book of Common Prayer cannot with justice be accused of any neglect in this respect. For the "two or three," or more, "gathered together in

CHRIST'S Name," we have solemn Litanies and General Confessions; we have also days of obligation for all the faithful—Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.¹ For those who desire cleansing from their own personal faults, we have particular Confession and Absolution, besides plain teaching on the duty of performing private self-examination, and praying for forgiveness. These are not superseded by the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Rather, although, in that, CHRIST'S Death is pleaded for the world's forgiveness, we are first required, one by one, to use the penitential exercises for our own souls' health, and then to come "holy and clean, in the marriage-garment," where we may offer for the Church at large.

Of what these exercises are, and the dispositions which accompany them, something will be said in the following chapters. For the present, let it suffice to have shown that the penitence now advocated is, in most of its features, the same which has been recognised by the thought and conscience of man from the Fall downwards; and that it still holds its position, because it cannot be dispensed with. CHRIST indeed has been manifested to "destroy the works of the devil;" but "we see not yet all things subjected to Him:" the battle still rages, and the wounds received are many, even by those who own no Master but the Crucified. Still, therefore, we kneel in lowly self-abasement, like David; and David's words are become our own words, to be used at all penitential seasons.

On the other hand, since CHRIST came and died and rose again, we have been made "sons of light;" and the darkness of our sorrow is illumined by the prospect of a glorious deliverance. In nothing do we more confidently expect guidance from the HOLY SPIRIT the Comforter, than the drawing forth, as it were, into open day that "godly sorrow

¹ Not that a nation's obligation to repent can be discharged by reciting the Commination Service. We remember how Mr. Gladstone strove to rouse his country to a more substantial penitence by restitution; but he failed to touch the British conscience. Nor can the freeing of slaves in the last century be justly regarded as an act of reparation. It would be another thing if one could see the Divorce Act repealed, and the secularising of schools and universities put a stop to. Such repentance would be costly indeed.

which worketh repentance unto salvation which bringeth no regret." It is true that a soul penetrated with light from above will experience more lively grief than would have been attainable by the mere natural man: simply because no Christian can banish from recollection his Master's bitter Cross ;¹ so that, in all he does to excite contrition, he is moved by the thought of those wounds, and that pain and shame so freely borne for him. True, also, it is, that self-examination is felt to have become a far graver task, when the conscience has been submitted to His gaze, who both Himself knows "what is in man," and by His Spirit enables us to search and try our ways, with an insight like His own. But nothing of this kind can hinder the fulfilment of gracious promises to all who believe in CHRIST risen from the dead. "He is faithful and righteous to forgive them their sins, and to cleanse them from all unrighteousness."

Two points are noticeable, bearing on the growth of personal responsibility in the use of penitence. He who has entered into the new life in CHRIST has something more to do than to bring ox or lamb to be slain, their blood for his own. He has to learn and labour, that he may know and confess, may hate and judge and renounce, his own sins. For GOD teaches our hearts by sending the HOLY SPIRIT, and we cannot depute to any of our brethren the task of cleansing us from our inward leprosy. But yet, again, there is a human ministry to which we may be led to have recourse, not for repentance, but for reception of pardon when sins have been confessed. There is a power of Absolution in the Catholic Church. This, also, makes an increased responsibility in the treatment of sin under the Gospel. The priest who absolves is charged with a real commission, to remit, and to restore, in his Divine Master's Name.

¹ Compare those beautiful lines by Dr. Maclagan :—

"Remember me, yet how canst Thou forget
What pain and anguish I have caused to Thee,
The Cross, the Agony, the Bloody Sweat,
And all the sorrow Thou didst bear for me?"

CHAPTER IV.

The Duty of Confession, from Holy Scripture.

THE large space which Confession has always occupied, both in the doctrine and in the practice of repentance, requires that we should give prominence to it in our thoughts at this stage of the enquiry.

The importance attached to this word may strike one at first with surprise. For, at least, it does not seem to be included among the first-formed notions of turning from sin. When we begin to reflect, nothing appears quite necessary except that one should be convinced that he has done wrong, and resolve to do so no more. The process has two stages only : it begins in the heart, and is continued in the reformed life. So long as there is moral improvement, what else can matter to the world at large ?

One may soon see, however, that repentance does require much more to make it satisfactory. Very probably the world would be content with moral improvement, if that could be secured by a solitary and secret effort of the will. But could it? Suppose that the question is only about renouncing certain vices or crimes, by which an individual has rendered himself either a source of danger, or at least offensive and unpopular to the community. Any one can see that his neighbours are not likely to trust him unless they know what his intentions really are. Else what is to prevent him from keeping back as much of the price as he chooses—cherishing a reserve of malice with which to plot against their peace in some new way? Whereas if he speaks out and acknowledges his fault, the neighbours will be able to quote his words against him if he tries to play them

false in the future. It is not a complete safeguard; but it is a great deal better than nothing. And then, too, we may say that the public conscience *exacts* confession from evil-doers. Society is determined to know whether its suspicions were well-founded, and whether it has judged—perhaps punished—the offender more or less than he deserved.

We come next to the religious motive. I may here remind the reader of what was said in the last chapter, that the more we realise GOD as ever present, almighty and omniscient, holy, full of compassion, and deserving both our fear and love, the more we learn to hate and mourn over the sins that we have done to His dishonour. But of such sorrow there must be outward evidence. Confession, then, becomes an imperative necessity. The inward grief must have an outlet. We confess, because we could not do otherwise. And we feel that, although the past cannot be undone, there is some slight reparation to the wounded love of a heavenly FATHER when we enumerate the details of our offence, by thought, word, and deed. "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in Thy sight: that Thou mayest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest." Rude as were the people whom Joshua led, they could understand that it was right and for "the glory of GOD," that Achan should make solemn confession of his trespass.

Finally, the penitent is impelled to confess, if it were only for his own safety and peace of mind. "Thy mouth hath testified against thee"¹ is not always the precursor of doom. Angels will tell hereafter of many a beloved charge of theirs, how light and hope returned to his soul through the honest voice of self-accusation. From that moment he knew himself, and knew the worst; but he also knew that he had renounced whatever could offend GOD. And thus the first penitential acknowledgment leads on to that other confession, which is of thanksgiving, to Him who both "heareth the prayer," and "forgiveth all thy sin."²

¹ See 2 Sam. i. 16.

² See Ps. xxx. 13; liv. 6; lxvi. 14, 15; cvi. 1.; and especially cvii.

With this short introduction, we should be prepared to consider the Scriptural teaching.

What we commonly find there described is an acknowledgment publicly made before GOD, and before a number of people; agreeing either with some charge that others had laid, or with the sincere but hitherto unspoken conviction of a man's own heart. In the latter event, there need be no shame in the avowal. To confess, may be to declare faith in CHRIST, whether with¹ or without² circumstances of danger. In the Psalms it is constantly used of proclaiming the Divine goodness and mercy. *Confessio aut laudantis est aut pœnitentis*. There is not, of necessity, a penitential ring in any of the three words commonly employed in the LXX.³ In the New Testament, however, in the most famous passages, the confession intended is clearly an acknowledgment of sins, by him who committed them.⁴ There is no invariable rule that others should stand by, accusing, though this often happens. The indispensable thing is, that the sinner should be accused by his own conscience. In one well-remembered instance these conditions were reversed. S. Paul, certainly, was not stricken in conscience when he admitted to Felix that he had chosen that way of worship which "the Jews called heresy."⁵ Rather, that was a specimen of the apostle's "boasting" in CHRIST. Nevertheless he *was* meeting an accusation. In spite of the irony of his ὁμολογῶ, S. Paul did then acknowledge a charge brought against him by his countrymen, on matters of common complaint among them; and he did this solemnly, as before a Divine as well as an earthly judge.

Almost without exception, the instances are of open, audible

¹ S. Matt. x. 32.

² Rom. x. 10.

³ ἐξομολογεῖσθαι, ἐξηγείσθαι, ἐξαγορεύειν. But no negative argument can be founded upon this. The words bear comprehensive meanings, "to acknowledge" or "to declare," and are therefore not unsuitable to a man in whose mouth are the praises of God. But they are equally appropriate for confessing sins. As we go on, we shall see that the signs and utterances of penitence are more abundant in the Old Testament, than in the New. Confession is, however, only a part of the service which our mouths must render to their Maker.

⁴ S. Matt. iii. 16; Acts xix. 18; S. James v. 16; 1 S. John i. 9.

⁵ Acts xxiv. 14.

confession.¹ Of course, there may be an utterance which is silent to all except GOD, who "knoweth the very secrets of the heart." *Habet aures Deus, habet et sonum cor. Interiora tua nunquam deest qui audiat.*² But that does not seem to have been much contemplated at the beginning, and GOD'S people evidently thought it more simply natural that the voice should be employed. "With the mouth confession is made," alike by innocent and guilty. That is certainly the way recognised in Holy Scripture.

There can be no doubt that public confession was practised under the Law of Moses; (though the repentance, which it was meant to declare, is indicated better by the context, than by the particular words used for confessing). If the instances are not very frequent, there are enough to illustrate a rule of conduct which must have been thoroughly understood. Sometimes we see the whole congregation of Israel suppliants with their spokesman; as on the day of atonement, when the high priest, pressing both hands on the head of a live goat, made solemn confession of the iniquities of the people. Sometimes, besides this annual ceremonial cleansing, there would be special acts of self-abasement, with deprecation of the Divine displeasure, in which many took part; as, for instance, at Joel's "solemn assembly," or during the mission of Ezra, after the exile. Or when, at the bidding of another prophet, there comes a voice of wide-spread lamentation, "Our transgressions are multiplied before Thee, and our sins testify against us . . . in transgressing and denying the LORD, and turning away from following our GOD, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood."³ But the GOD of Israel is "plenteous in mercy, and repenteth Him of the evil." There-

¹ Every instance, that is, where the word "confession" is used. The word does not occur in the Prayer of Manasses, (which has had much Catholic acceptance, and is familiar to many of us through Bishop Andrewes' Devotions;) nor is there anything to show whether that was offered privately, or before witnesses (nor any certainty whether it was actually composed by the captive king).

² S. Aug. (*Enarrat. in Ps. ciii. 2*).

³ See Ezra x; Joel ii; Isaiah lix. 12, etc.

fore His servants urge and intreat the people to "take with them words, and return unto the LORD." "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."¹

Thus the tradition is handed down, till there comes a crisis in Israel's repentance, through the preaching of the great Forerunner. "For now is the axe laid unto the root of the trees; every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." So Jerusalem and all Judæa go out to John, "and are baptised of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." Their response to his mission is made by this clearly-spoken proof of the national disposition towards penitence. That could only be genuine, if the confession were followed by amendment of life, and resort to the Saviour. Still, the words were good words. "All the people . . . justified GOD, being baptised with the baptism of John."

In considering confession as it meets us in the Old Testament, we have to travel back to a time when Israel was a "holy people," chosen out of all the families of the earth, and consecrated by the observance of a moral code delivered from heaven. It is easy to see how the peculiar separation and consecration of Abraham's seed would lead to a special dread of sin and its consequences; which might not always restrain offenders, but would at least dispose them to sorrow and fear after the wrong was done. Whether the person to remind them were law-giver or king, prophet or priest, there would always be the same argument from Israel's unique position and privileges. No other nation owed so much to the GOD of their fathers: none were united by so close a bond of fellowship among themselves. That is the reason why so very much of the language of the Old Testament is penitential, and why confession was at all times to the Jews such a familiar thought and habit. "We have sinned with our fathers: we have done amiss, and dealt wickedly." Yet we saw that, although the whole of the chosen people are commonly represented as guilty of the same sin in forsaking GOD, the corporate acts of penitence are rare, except in some remarkable instances already quoted. But what keep

¹ Prov. xxviii. 13.

up the tradition are the fervent intercessions of saints, from Moses to Jeremiah; whose personal earnestness is the more striking, because they, for the most part, stand forth as solitary figures. "Though our iniquities testify against us, work Thou for Thy Name's sake, O LORD: for our backslidings are many: we have sinned against Thee. O Hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble, why shouldest Thou be as a sojourner in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? Why shouldest Thou be as a man astonished, as a mighty man that cannot save? Yet Thou, O LORD, art in the midst of us, and we are called by Thy Name; leave us not." So pleads the most compassionate of prophets; but no voice joins with his, no brother stays up his hands when they are heavy, no human heart enters into the passion of his grief. Yet he continues to plead, as if all Israel had spoken by his mouth.¹

That is the aspect under which the penitence of the ancient Jewish Church is presented to us. The confessions are rarely unanimous: more often the prophet alone humbles himself, while the people sin on, and show no concern. Still the tone, whenever we hear it, is very sorrowful, humble, and loving. Then, when individuals confess their own personal misdeeds, apart from the national backslidings, there is the same sorrow expressed towards GOD. But we find them also owning in this way to injuries done to their neighbours; so that the public confession almost serves the purpose of a reparation made to the tribes of Israel. David accuses his own pride, that has brought a pestilence upon his subjects: Achan is forced to acknowledge that by his grievous fault the armies of Jehovah have suffered defeat. The Law requires that "when a man or a woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the LORD, and that soul be guilty; then they shall confess their sin which they have done; and he shall make restitution for his guilt in full, and add unto it the fifth part thereof, and give it unto him in respect of whom he hath been guilty."² The congregation come together not merely to abase themselves before an offended GOD, but sometimes as them-

¹ Another striking instance is in Daniel ix.

² Numbers v. 6, 7.

selves trespassed against, that the sinner may make them such public amends as are due.

This may suffice for a brief review of confession under "the Law and the prophets," before "the Kingdom of GOD" had been preached at CHRIST'S coming. As we have seen, there were special causes for its prominence among the Jews. It was impossible that such a duty could be neglected by the one favoured nation, the "first-born" of Jehovah. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities."¹

Yet the exceptional position of GOD'S ancient people was not absolutely required as a plea for confession; nor even necessary to make a *public* owning of sins appear just and reasonable. That institution would agree with popular notions of what was fitting, in any country, during the earlier stages of its national life. Particularly one may say this with regard to reparation to the family or tribe. When society is in its infancy, the punishment of evil-doers is a matter to be dealt with at solemn assemblies, and on holy ground: the "secular arm" is too feeble and capricious in its movements, to be trusted. A public conscience, however, exists, and to this offenders are made responsible when the congregation calls them to account. Indeed, our LORD Himself seems to approve of some such arrangement, in that famous passage in S. Matthew xviii., where He lays down rules of discipline. "If thy brother sin, go, show him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more, that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established. And if he refuse to hear thee, tell it unto the Church; and if he refuse to hear the Church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican. Verily I say unto you, What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My FATHER which is in heaven. For where two or three

¹ Amos iii. 2.

are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them." We have to notice here the merciful intention to lead the erring by gentle means to repentance, or if not, to correct him by a salutary exclusion or excommunication; but that is not all. The thing most to be desired is that he should "hear the Church;" if he will do that, all will be well. But surely our LORD contemplates a hearing *by* the Church also—an authoritative hearing and judging of the criminal, by those to whom a fault must be laid open, by information based on confession, before they can state the Church's decision upon it. We seem to see the officers of a Christian community coming together and "agreeing" what they should ask of GOD, to guide them in this business. Indeed it is hardly necessary that they should be Christians, for this. The principle of having "two or three" to witness would be well known to those bred under the Law. What one should rather say is that this whole passage is in harmony with a simple maxim of conduct everywhere intelligible—that sinners should come to the light and show their deeds, if they would have peace with GOD and man. We may say that CHRIST by what He here enjoined gave to those simple ideas a Catholic authority.

However, if the doctrine be universal, it is also very particularly the doctrine of the New Testament, intended for us as Christians. Public confession has the sanction of various apostles. S. James enjoins it: S. John promises forgiveness to those who practise it.¹ S. Paul received many who came for this purpose at Ephesus. Let there be no uncertainty as to its having had apostolic authority. That may be unwelcome news to some who profess horror at the least suggestion of telling sins in the hearing of others. But we are not yet considering what is expedient under modern conditions. The fact stands, that confessions were so made, and New Testament writers approve of their being made. There is no more doubt about the openness of the transaction, than there is that the people, who heard, used to pray for those who thus "opened

¹ S. James v. 16 will require no comment. Of 1 S. John i. 9, Bishop Westcott says, it means that we should "acknowledge our sins openly in the face of men."

their grief." Here was a regular exercise of the charity which "beareth one another's burdens."¹ It was a custom which gave no offence, so long as the terms of Christian intercourse were simple and unconstrained.

Indeed, the more one reflects on those old ways, the more natural and proper they appear to have been, *while they could be carried out.*² "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." What other course would have been so right? When wrong has been done, and the facts are proved, surely the culprit who still obstinately hides or "covers" his fault cannot "prosper." He will know that he is acting a lie, and his heart will grow harder, his mood more sullen, each day that he persists. In these modern times there might be other ways open to him. He might surrender himself to justice if he had committed a crime punishable by law of the realm. Or, for secret sin, he might resort either to auricular confession, or to that unspoken sort, to which allusion was made before.³ But, whatever may be said for these newer ways—and there is much—none of them can be called quite so simple and natural as the more ancient.⁴ For "none of us liveth to himself:" we "live unto the LORD" first, and after that, to a great extent, for the community, though always "in the LORD." Now, nearly every sin that men commit may be, directly or indirectly, an "occasion of falling" to others; and, therefore, it is for the community, by regulations of their own, made in the fear of GOD, to punish or to spare, to cast out or to restore offenders of nearly every class. But if they restore offenders, it will be because they have been moved by their

¹ See Galat. vi. 1, 2 : 1 Cor. v. 2 ; 2 Cor. ii. 6-8.

² So S. Augustine (*Ep.* cliii. 10), "Has sibi partes humanitatis, ubi potest, omnis homo apud hominem vindicat." (He is commenting on S. James v. 16.)

³ How strange the ancient world thought it for any one to think, pray, or read for long without speaking aloud, is curiously illustrated in S. Augustine's *Confessions*, book vi. 3. After noting S. Ambrose's habit of reading to himself as extraordinary, he thinks that the inducement must have been either to save his voice, which was weak, or to avoid being questioned about his reading.

⁴ No praise is hereby intended of the barbarous discipline, which used to follow confession in the Primitive Church.

honest and full confession; made first, of course, before GOD and holy angels, but also spoken out in face of the aggrieved neighbours themselves. The intercession of the latter, so precious in GOD'S sight, derives its loving earnestness from consideration of the others' faults *as revealed*, together with pity induced by their manifest sorrow. Then it is that "if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it."¹

This, then, is Christian doctrine. We ought not to say that the subject comes often to the front in that shape, in the New Testament. The former covenant, which "beareth children unto bondage," is naturally more concerned with sin's abasement, than "our mother," the free and heavenly Jerusalem. The contrast is striking, if we turn from a lamentation like that in Isaiah lix., quoted above, to where the baptised in fire at Pentecost are met together for prayer. These are no longer the guilty beseeching for pardon, but the elect of GOD, confidently pleading that signs and wonders may be done "through the Name of Thy holy servant JESUS." But still, the time would come when penitential assemblies must have their turn, and in the apostolic writings we are able to trace the spirit in which they were conducted.

To confess publicly would be the instinct of a youthful people. After a time public confession was discontinued, for good and sufficient reasons. There is no need in this chapter to pursue the history to a day later than that of the apostles. We shall come in the next three to what soon became the practice of the Primitive Church. But one can see already some of the reasons for changing. First, the increasing number of sins, secret as well as notorious, which would require attention as the Church grew older. This must have been the principal cause of the change. It is easy to understand how, as their number increased, an indispensable reserve would incline public opinion towards withdrawal

¹ This, as we shall see, was made a great point of by the Fathers. So Tertullian (*De Pæn.* x.), "Condoleat universum corpus, et ad remedium conlaboret." And S. Ambrose (*De Pæn.* ii. 10), "Fleat pro te Mater Ecclesia, et culpam tuam lacrymis lavet." And in the *Apostolical Constitutions*, ii. 41, we find the direction, πάντων ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ προσευχομένων.

from the crowd. Another reason, applicable to all communities that have advanced beyond the early stage, is the improved administration of justice in secular courts. For instance, the Christians were forced to bring all sorts of causes into their spiritual courts at first, not only while the Emperor's judges were heathens, as in S. Paul's time,¹ but even after Constantine, because the executive was so feeble and incompetent.² One can understand how it was that many matters were then submitted by voluntary confession to the bishops, which, under a stronger rule, would have been the business of the prætors. But afterwards, when a mighty prince like Justinian, or Charlemagne, aspired to preside over all causes, ecclesiastical as well as civil, it became inevitable that the Church's *forum externum* would be little frequented. The paternal authority of elders, "sitting in the gate," has to be superseded. The sinner of a later civilisation is no longer treated like a naughty child, corrected with stripes at first, and then received back to loving embraces. These are not now the legitimate consequences of membership in Holy Church. Add to these a third reason, which is supported by the high authority of Hooker. Public confession is best, he says, so long as Christians have not left their first love, and while they are bound by a common sense of danger in persecution. But as a matter of fact, when peace returned with Constantine, the love of Christians quickly grew cold; "faults were not corrected in charity, but noted with delight; schisms and discords prevailed everywhere; it seemed requisite that

¹ See 1 Cor. vi. 1. In the first century, A.D., "the Roman administration maintained a very small staff of officials: public safety was not properly attended to" . . . "the Christian Church necessarily enacted laws for itself." (See Prof. Ramsay's *Church in Rom. Emp.* pp. 373, 177.)

² The punishments were often cruel, and the churches were resorted to for sanctuary. The 7th (otherwise 8th) Canon of Sardica, A.D. 343, enacts that, whereas "it often happens that persons in need of mercy, who on account of their crimes have been sentenced to transportation, or are bound by some other sentence, take refuge in the church, they must not be denied help, but without scruple or hesitation (ἀνευ τοῦ διστασθαι) petition shall be made for their pardon." (See Hefele, E.T. vol. ii. p. 136.) Theodoret speaks of horrible tortures inflicted by judges at the bidding of Arians.

voluntary penitents should surcease from open confession.”¹ However this may have been, it appears certain that the public method will generally be abandoned, so soon as it ceases to be required for the restitution or discipline of public offenders.

Then, more and more, do the best uses of confession begin to be understood ; for which publicity is in no way essential. No publicity is required for maintaining the glory of Almighty GOD in conflict with man’s transgression. It is true that the Hebrew prophets would loudly contrast the Divine truth with Israel’s obstinate folly and ingratitude. True also that Achan is said to have made open avowal of his guilt, “giving glory to GOD,” before the assembled tribes ; since Achan’s crime had involved all Israel in disgrace, and all Israel had to be assured that there was a cause for what GOD had done to punish it. But “all GOD’S works praise Him,” and His Providence requires no defence from sinful man. What really glorify GOD are the sincerity and lowliness of heart with which penitents own the truth of what GOD has long laid to their charge. Over these, angels rejoice ; and yet He needs not even the witness of angels.

Nor has it ever been necessary, because it was not possible, to obtain a public pardon for every sort of wrong done to a society of Christian people. It is quite true that most sins that a man commits are injurious to those around, among whom he walks ; but very often the mischief is too indirect for a straightforward avowal to be made, while for direct wrongdoing, as by fraud, robbery, or slander, law-suits are the usual resource in civilised and well-governed countries. Or again, when amends are to be made without the legal process, our LORD’S rule is, “If thy brother hath ought against thee, go and be reconciled to him, and then come and offer thy gift.” At the altar of offering he would find himself by the side of priest and congregation ; but the confession (if under the Church’s sanction), would have been made before that, elsewhere, and very possibly in private. There are, still, rare cases occurring, in which a single crime has so outraged the public feeling of a district, that all will insist on its being

¹ See Hooker (book vi. chap. iv. 3).

acknowledged, before death overtakes the wretched criminal: as if a reproach had to be wiped off from the neighbourhood, or almost from the nation itself.¹ But the chief thought now, among Christians, is of confessing to GOD only; and the great aim of Christian teaching has ever been to show how the Divine forgiveness turns upon this, and is accessible to this, though men may harden their hearts. "The LORD is full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide, neither will He keep His anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us after our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us." To the psalmist who composed that thanksgiving perhaps the return of Israel from exile would be nearly all that was intended by the removal "from east to west." But to a Christian there is much more in the words than that.² They describe the restoration of life and peace to a forgiven penitent, brought home to the kingdom of grace and hope of eternal glory. All of which it is the Christian's privilege to believe, since, through the shedding of the precious Blood, we have had "an Advocate with the FATHER, JESUS CHRIST the righteous."

Still, we must allow that the idea of direct access to Him need not have been obscured by the public avowal, and probably was not; although less easy, so, to be seized and retained. And surely there is a loss, now that we can no longer have the tender sympathy of a number of charitable people, praying for some poor soul whose sad tale of wickedness they have just heard.³ The audience would not always be hard-

¹ Not long ago in England, in sentencing one guilty of an atrocious series of murders (a foreigner), the judge is reported to have observed, "The only consolation is that you are not an Englishman"—or words to that effect.

² "The Psalm" (103rd), "anticipates the spirit of the New Testament. It furnishes fit language of thanksgiving for the greater blessing of a more marvellous redemption than that of Israel from Babylon." (Dr. Kirkpatrick's Commentary on the Psalms in the Cambridge Bible.)

³ Compare Sozomen's History, book vii. chap. 16: "The bishop conducts the ceremony, and prostrates himself with the penitents, weep-

hearted and scornful. We all remember the touching picture of the faithful at Milan, weeping in compassion for their great emperor, whom a fearless bishop had enjoined to "repent like David, since he had sinned like David." And yet it is not absolutely necessary that our intercessions should be inspired by a knowledge of our neighbour's failings; and there is something beautiful in our Anglican custom of praying "Spare Thou them, O GOD, which confess their faults," though we cannot tell what those faults have been.

On the whole, both losses and gains have resulted to the Church through discontinuance of public penitence.¹ But the change to private or auricular confession has been found expedient for many reasons. It suits the existing conditions of society very much better than what it displaced. And its advantages are obvious. We are spared much pain and shame, we avoid the giving of scandal, we preserve modesty, and we enjoy the benefit of our hearer's whole attention, granted exclusively to our case. Nor can this way be fairly called unscriptural. For surely, our Saviour's words, "If thy brother sin, go, show him his fault between thee and him alone," are full authority for, though they do not exactly describe, the fashion of confession as we know it. The point of difference is, only, that our LORD makes the *hearer* take the initiative, instead of the penitent; so that the fault, in this case, could not have been altogether unknown before confession.²

But we must be prepared for objections. Some will ask why, if public confession is given up, auricular should be the

ing. And all the people burst into tears, and groan aloud. Afterwards the bishop raises up the prostrate" etc.

¹ The public confession has not been lost everywhere; at least, a quasi-public penitence was long retained in religious communities. "It was ever his practice" [S. Vincent's] "to humble himself by a public confession of everything, ever so small, in which he was conscious of being wrong, and he would kneel down before the lowest of his inferiors to ask pardon for the least shadow of a fault." (*Life of S. Vincent de Paul*, by Mrs. R. F. Wilson, p. 218.)

² The incident in S. John viii. 3-12 may also have been intended as an example to the Church. The accused is first rescued from a concourse of cruel denouncing tongues; and then, when "Jesus was left alone, and the woman where she was, in the midst," the merciful Judge "lifts up Himself," and speaks.

alternative. Why not leave a man to make peace with GOD in his own way, without interference? Now, of course, if every sort of spoken confession is to be barred, there is nothing left to discuss, and our enquiry must end. And yet this independence has a good side. It deserves higher praise than to be called a mark of the stiff-necked Anglo-Saxon, or a feature of the immovable self-control which goes with culture and refinement. For, surely, a Christian who has "put on the whole armour of GOD" *ought* to feel that he is already provided with the best protection. The enemy may wound him still, but he is more manly if he refrains from showing his wounds, or putting himself into hospital for a hurt that he should bear in silence. Let him rather learn to walk more circumspectly and redeem the time.

What is our answer to this? That, while holding in much respect the English reserve about personal religion, we still think that it may be carried too far; and that to confess one's sins before a duly qualified hearer is, not indeed of obligation, but perfectly right and prudent at certain times.

There are three reasons for this: three things in its favour. The first, because of the connection of confession with Absolution; which must be left till we have made more way with our subject. It is the chief reason of all, but we are not ready for it yet.

The second is, for the avoiding of self-deceit. Whatever form repentance may assume, we must not encourage a "blindness of heart" from which we of the English Church pray ever to be delivered. Reserve is excellent in its proper place; but may there not be a danger, that behind those lips so jealously closed there is no honest arraignment of self before GOD, in any shape? Are not sins persisted in sometimes, because they are not brought even into the private *forum* of conscience? or because though brought there to be judged, they are not rightly understood, the delinquent never hearing them called by their right names? Sometimes these are very private failings: sometimes neighbours suspect their existence, and will say so to a third person, though not, unfortunately, to the person suspected. Whichever way it is, there can be no doubt that many live either in a state of false peace, or of inward

distress which is utterly fruitless of amendment. How much better it would be—we have said this once before—to bear the pain of a truthful accusation of self! No one who has not tried it can tell how the clouds of self-deceit roll away, directly the sound of one's own voice is heard, uttering the plain English of what a sin has been.¹ Still less can it be known, without trial, how immense the relief when one feels that a false disguise had been stripped off, and we have ceased to shun the gaze of an Almighty yet most merciful FATHER!

There is one more reason still. Auricular confession gives opportunities for taking advice, which were not available with the public penitence,² and which the most reserved of Christians, on the other hand, ought not to despise. If it is true that the soul's constant and universal need is supplied by an ever-present Divine Comforter, it is none the less certain that, on extraordinary occasions, even the wisest and strongest may require human comfort. The spirit most calm and patient under "buffeting for its faults" will be refreshed, if it may lay its burden now and then on the faithful shoulders of a friend. And such a friend might be any discreet and pious Christian; so long as he was enabled to speak through the faults having been confessed in his hearing, together with the temptations which led to their commission.³

¹ "Plain English" is of all things least acceptable to the irresolute. Sir Walter Scott, in *Redgauntlet*, makes one say who had fallen very low, yet was by no means destitute of good feeling, "I think my confession would sound better *in Latin!*"

² That is, we cannot be sure they were. The penitentiaries (of whom something will be said hereafter) must have counselled their penitents; but hardly at the times when they were making confession in the Church.

³ The comparative value of the two sorts of confession will be more clearly seen later on, when we have gone through a short study of the historical development of the two systems. It is likely, however, that most of us will come to the same conclusion as M. François Coppée, who says, (*La Bonne Souffrance*, p. 253), "Quel courage il fallait, au Chrétien des temps héroïques, alors qu'agenouillé devant ses frères, il déclarait humblement ses fautes et en demandait pardon! Disons-le tout bas. C'était trop beau. Nous ne sommes plus dans les catacombes de Rome, et l'Eglise a très sagement fait d'instituer l'aveu secret, d'exiger de celui qui le reçoit la discrétion absolue, et de placer le prêtre dans l'ombre du confessional."

In the next chapter, an endeavour will be made to show how in ancient times the punishment of offenders was rigorously enforced, till, by degrees, the system was adapted to the gentler principles which began to prevail ; how the Church was obliged to appoint men duly qualified to act as guides of individual souls ; and how some such provision for obtaining ghostly counsel is still requisite, not merely for the sin-laden in their private difficulties and temptations, but also for those desirous of living the higher life in CHRIST.

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTERS V. AND VI.

On the Primitive Ecclesiastical Methods of Repentance.

SOME doubt may be felt as to whether so large and difficult a subject as the primitive penance has any proper place in a small book like this. Those who wish to know about it have ready access to Hooker, Thorndike, Bingham, the English translation of Pelliccia, or Smith's *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*. Whereas, our own argument cannot be much affected by variations of discipline in the Primitive Church. Nor is it very necessary that missionaries, especially, should know what those old customs were, who have before them the present and perpetual spiritual needs of human nature, and look ever to the mercy which has drawn near to supply them, through the Incarnation of a Divine Saviour.

Yet it is important to show that confession and absolution have been in the Church from the beginning. Important and interesting to see the penitential features already stamped on that heroic little family that "went through fire and water," and so to their "wealthy place," when the sword of the persecutor had been sheathed at last. But in order to do this, some principal landmarks must be noted. And, among other things to be observed, we shall see how ancient history throws light on the distinction of sins by their gravity—a distinction which we find preserved in our Book of Common Prayer.

Protestants and Roman Catholics still differ greatly in the construction which they place, not merely on particular facts, handed down, but on the whole intention of primitive penitence.¹

¹ Thus from America has arisen a Protestant champion of the heaviest calibre in the person of Dr. H. C. Lea (*Hist. of Auricular Con-*

Protestants, for the most part, contend that—

(1) Confessions of sins, when required by the Church in early times, were always made in public, because they were addressed to the congregation: *and were not, therefore, confessions to God.*

(2) They were an integral part of the penal discipline which followed: *therefore, had nothing to do with the heart's conversion to God.*

(3) Those who had completed their canonical penance were restored to communion by the people, acting with and through their bishop. This was still an exercise of congregational discipline: *therefore, there was no sacramental absolution from the sins confessed.*

(4) When private confession began, it was not followed by absolution: *therefore, nothing like the present system was known.*

All these four conclusions are disputable, though there is not quite evidence enough to disprove (3) and (4). The fourth may be true so far as this, that the primitive confessions were separated by a considerable interval of time from the restoration of the penitent, who must make satisfaction before he could be absolved; and the ancient system was, therefore, unlike the present in one important point. The third should be compared with what is said, below, on the corresponding third statement from the Roman Catholic side.

Roman Catholics assert, generally, that—

(1) The confessions, though public, were made to Almighty GOD, and *no reconciliation to the community* at large, or to individuals with whom those confessing had been at variance, was properly intended thereby.¹ The people merely added their prayers.

fession and Indulgences, 3 vols., Philadelphia, 1896), while eminent French scholars, as Duchèsne and Batiffol (*Études d'Histoire et de Théologie Positive*, Paris, 1902), have been busy in strengthening the Catholic position. Not much has been written of late in our own country, except either on the doctrine, or from the side of practical piety—to which this small volume is a contribution.

¹ Mgr. Batiffol (*Études*, p. 77,) insists that, according to Tertullian, "le pécheur est reconcilié à Dieu, non à l'Église . . . une satisfaction offerte à

(2) But these public confessions were not so much acknowledgment with the lips, even to GOD, as acts of abasement and self-chastisement before Him, continued through the whole term of penance. *Confessions of sins, seriatim, were always private.*

(3) Here they are not entirely agreed among themselves. Some would raise little objection to the Protestant statement above (also marked 3). They would make the bishop more conspicuous, indeed, in the canonical absolution; but allow that that was merely the act of release from the discipline, not to be reckoned a "second baptism" of the penitent. Those who hold this opinion add, that a real sacramental absolution was given as well, but separately, and in private. But, now, Duchêsne and Batiffol throw doubt on the private absolution, and strongly assert the sacramental character of the public.¹ This is not important: the only serious question is, of course, whether a sacrament was thought of at all.

(4) They barely notice the non-sacramental methods advocated by S. Chrysostom and other Fathers, and minimise their value.²

Of these, one would say that the statements (1) and (2), where italicised, ought not to be received without allowing for exceptions. When the confession was of "*minora delicta, quæ non ad Deum committuntur*,"³ surely the congregation would be thought of, and included, in the penitent's intention. And it is hard to believe that they would not often have claimed an interest even in that which most of all offended the supreme

Dieu devant l'Église par le pécheur, et une supplication adressée à Dieu par l'Église pour le pécheur." In some of his moods, possibly, Tertullian would not have wished to see too much of reconciliation to the Church; though one is glad to agree with him in thinking that the other, greater reconciliation, was what was chiefly kept in view. But why not say, rather—I quote from an unpublished letter of the late Bishop of Nassau—"To be reconciled to the Head is to be reconciled to the Body, and *vice versa*: the Body is not to be conceived of as existing apart from the Head?"

¹ Compare the opinions expressed, again, on this subject in the last paragraph of the Appendix to chap. viii.

² Here also they would seem to differ among themselves. See the theory of M. Boudinhon, quoted by Batiffol (*Études*, p. 198).

³ S. Cyprian. *Ep.* xi. (*Ad Plebem*.)

GOD, viz., idolatry. Nor does it seem inconsistent with the bluntness and freedom of ancient manners,¹ that even public confessions should have been explicit (although, certainly, they would be short, and concerned with overt acts much more than motives). S. Irenæus and Eusebius relate instances of confessions made in public, which appear to have been somewhat detailed.² There would be little care to "keep one's mouth like a bridle" in days when reticence and self-control were so seldom observed. Still, it is likely that the majority of applicants for penance took their places in the ranks after description of their one principal offence, and that that alone was published, and formed the substance of their confession. The publication would be similar to that which accompanied the special sin-offerings of the Jews.

As to (4), it is easy to imagine that Roman Catholics would be prejudiced against a Patristic doctrine by which contrition and satisfaction were held to be availing without sacramental absolution, and, as such, were recommended to the faithful.³ But we should remember that when the Fathers spoke of dispensing with the priest's help in confession, they were always addressing themselves to persons leading regular lives in the Church. They never disparaged the power which CHRIST'S ministers inherit from the apostles.

¹ Especially as, during the later Empire, Roman manners began to be tainted with barbarism through an infusion of Goth and Vandal immigrants.

² See S. Iren. III. chap. iv. 3. Euseb. v. chap. 28; vi. chap. 9; vii. chap. 9.

³ Modern French scholars have abandoned some of the theories of two hundred years ago. Jesuit writers of the 17th century laboured to prove identity between their own practice and that of the Primitive Church; as if nearly all sins had been remissible only by private confession and absolution, and without painful or public discipline. Thus they indeed minimised the importance of prayers offered by repenting sinners for themselves; but laid the utmost stress on the Church's *pœnitentia arcana*, making over both public discipline and irremissible sins to the Montanists, whom they compared to the Jansenists of their own day. (See, for instance, Morinus, *De Pœnit.* v. 31, and ix. 20, 21; Petavius, *De Pœnit.* vi. 1-5.) These views are no longer held tenable to the full extent; and consequently I have made little use of the great Jesuit authors. The more common opinion now is, that absolutions were public, and confession not enjoined for ordinary faults.

We, in the Church of England, enjoy greater freedom of choice, not being bound by the decrees of Trent. Our appeal is to antiquity (as the Tractarians used to proclaim). Submission to those of old may, of course, be carried to an extreme. We are not in bondage to each and all of the doctrines, and customs great or small. But, surely, there could be no harm, and might indeed be much good, if, without the rigorous discipline, we could conform our penitential practice (as we already do our authorised language), to the general principles laid down by Fathers like S. Chrysostom, S. Augustine, and S. Leo. Earlier than that, we should find the rules less congenial, and more rudely tentative. But at the end of the fourth century, and in the first half of the fifth, we discover in the great writers a spirit which answers remarkably to the liberality of our English Prayer Book. Confession and absolution are freely granted to those who need restoration through the power of the keys. Access to the Sacraments is granted without these, by prayer alone, or prayer with fasting, and alms and thanksgiving, to all persons whose consciences are void of "the great offence."¹

It has not been thought advisable to carry on our notice of penitential customs from primitive times down to our own. For the last three centuries or more our Prayer Book will speak for itself. The exhortations contained therein can never have become quite a dead letter; and it is remarkable that some of the best authenticated instances of the use of confession occurred during the troublous times of Charles I., and the vicious reign of his son.²

¹ S. Augustine says (*De Nupt. et Concup.* l. cap. 33; and often besides), "Oratio Dominica est nostra quotidiana mundatio."

² Charles I. himself confessed, and his favourite Buckingham; Royalists condemned by Cromwell would confess to bishops or clergy who had the courage to attend them to the scaffold. Even Lenthall, the Speaker of the Long Parliament, confessed before his death. Confession held a regular place in the ascetic lives of Morley, Ken, Lady Maynard, Mrs. Godolphin, and many others their contemporaries. (See Dean Plumtre's *Life of Ken*, and Mr. W. H. Hutton's *History of the English Church from Charles I. to Queen Anne*.) Richard Baxter tells, in his *Autobiography*, how a youthful friend, who had given way to drinking, would "go to good ministers with sad confessions," as if this was a

During the Middle Ages, everyone knows that sacramental confession continued to be enjoined and regularly observed. The chain of evidence is unbroken, and there is no need to examine the links when there are so many. However, it is now generally admitted that abuses crept in during the medieval period : penance became mechanical, and contrition was almost forgotten. One chief object of the Jesuit, Oratorian, and Borromean revivals on the Continent was to bring back the Church to a healthful condition in this respect—an object to which one cannot doubt that men like Laud, Herbert, and Ken contributed too in England, working on independent lines. Thus it is not well to import rules of conduct from the Middle Ages, except with extreme caution. We are safer if we make a bridge back to the age of the great Councils, and sit at the feet of saints and martyrs who then instructed the Church.

Yet let us not forget what we owe to the vitality of the “penitent heart and lively faith,” through all the strange fluctuations of medieval piety. Let us remember how penitence gave the first impulse to many a grand religious movement ; how England and Scotland profited by the remorse of S. Columba, and all Europe by the conversion of S. Francis. Let us honour also the memories of pious founders, whom sorrow for their own or their people’s transgressions moved, like David and the Magdalene of old, to bring costly offerings to the LORD who had received them into His peace. Let us remember Westminster Abbey, and S. Alban’s, and the fair College which Chichele’s self-reproach gave to Oxford. Nor should we fail to preserve grateful recollection of the high and pure tone of monastic religion, fed by the zeal of earnest spirits flying from a life of crime. Nor leave unacknowledged those whose penance took the shape of pious pilgrimages—whole-some tonics for souls exhausted by a ferment of stormy passions. Nor withhold our reverence from that tender pity which succoured the victims of plague or civil war, encouraging

perfectly natural and obvious incident in his repentance. And finally, the Bishops’ Visitation Articles of this period would contain stringent enquiries as to whether the rule of secrecy (113th Canon) had been kept by confessors.

even the most informal confession, sooner than to let men die without assurance of GOD'S pardon.¹

So did our forefathers treasure up, and preserve until happier times, the merciful Gospel of the Saviour of sinners.

I should say here that, for the Primitive Penitence, I have derived much assistance from Dr. Swete's Article in the *Journal of Sacred Studies*, April, 1903. But I have not read Harnack. In an enquiry like this, the personal piety of a scholar may be concerned, quite as much as his critical *acumen*. The result is great diversity of opinion; and many will think that the distinction I have drawn between Protestant and Catholic writers is much too sharp. For instance, some of the former now suggest that the reconciliation of penitents was at first decided by the voice of a prophet or πνευματικός (*Gal.* vi. 1), whose authority to judge would depend on the measure of his spiritual gifts. That view would neither necessitate, nor absolutely preclude, the subsequent intervention of a bishop.

However, the only really important question is, whether the early Church believed in a *sacramental* cleansing of the penitent? And I think I am right in saying that this is still denied by the majority of Protestant writers. Take Dr. H. C. Lea for an example:—"Admission to reconciliation naturally fell to the bishop." That is generally agreed upon. But why? Because "if it had involved any supernatural power to bind and to loose, the priest would have been equally competent to perform it." The priest was excluded, he thinks, merely because he lacked the presidential authority of a bishop. Nothing else was thought of. (See *Hist. of Auric. Conf.*, vol. i., p. 54, etc.)

¹ See the chapter on The Black Death in Mr. Capes' *History of the English Church in the Fourteenth Century*.

CHAPTER V.

Hearers of Confessions, and Spiritual Guides.

WE proceed with our next step. If confession has been thought advisable, we must soon come to a decision upon the office, or service, of a confessor. Not very much light is to be derived here from ancient records; and yet it will be best not to pass them over entirely. We of the Church of England, who take our stand on the doctrine of undivided Christendom, should not despise the support to be had from thence, for ordinances which we still revere.

Not much is known about confessors, nor about systematic confession of any kind, in the two first centuries after the Christian era.¹ But, if the latter was enjoined and practised by the apostles, as we know from the New Testament that it was;² and if we also find it fully established at the beginning of the third century, we cannot suppose that there had been any discontinuance in the interval. Confessions were made, and, most probably, made in public, after the rule of S. James v. 16.

When the records of penitence begin to be more explicit, we are at once struck by the preponderance given to the subject of punishments.

I. It is generally thought that there was no regular system

¹ Dr. Swete, (*Journal of Theol. Studies*, April, 1903,) has collected a few examples, from S. Clement, S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, S. Irenæus, the Epistle of S. Barnabas; and one much to the point from the Didaché:—*ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐξομολογήσῃ τὰ παραπτώματά σου*. [i.e. before Communion]. Dr. Lea, (*Hist. of Auric. Conf.*, vol. i., pp. 174, 175,) has no lack of authorities to cite for his own opposite view; but he invites distrust by his vehemence.

² The case for confession is quite clear; see Acts xix. 18, S. James v. 16, 1 S. John i. 8. Absolution has been thought more doubtful; but see chap. viii.

of discipline at first, either for catechumens or for those repenting after baptism. When the public penitence had been instituted, which Tertullian calls *exomologesis*, three offences were reserved, with which the Church refused to deal in the ordinary way, but referred them to the judgment of Almighty GOD. These three were idolatry, (involving apostasy from the faith,) adultery, and murder; as to which there is reason to think, that their selection may have been due to a misreading of the conciliar decree in Acts xv. 20.¹ It was supposed that the apostles had reserved the sins in question, and therefore the Church could do no less; until, about A.D. 220, Pope S. Calixtus thought fit to make an exception in favour of transgressors against the seventh commandment, and so by degrees the first severity was relaxed. While the exclusion remained in force, it seems likely that the crimes were reckoned heinous, not merely for their disobedience to the Divine law, but as most hurtful to Christian society. Idolatrous worship was a breach of the first and great commandment, but it was also what caused the deepest trouble and distress to the whole body of the faithful, shaming them before their heathen persecutors, and emptying their ranks by most lamentable disloyalty. The wound it gave to the unity of holy Church could hardly be forgiven: at the least, it must not be passed over without punishment.² Adultery, too, would be regarded as mainly a social offence, even by those who had not forgotten the higher ground taken by S. Paul, who insists on the obligation of purity for all who are made CHRIST'S members.³ For men's passions were very lawless; and the frequent breach of the conjugal bond led to savage brawls ending in bloodshed. So adultery

¹ S. Irenæus, Tertullian, and S. Cyprian, all quote this decree without the "things strangled." (The juxta-position of "fornicators, murderers, and idolaters," in Rev. xxii. 15, is remarkable, if we take that for a classification of those standing finally "without" the Church.)

² For an example of persistence in the rigid view, see Socrates' *History*, book vii. chap. 25; where a conversation is given between the patriarch Atticus and Asclepiades the Novatianist. Atticus was patriarch of Constantinople from A.D. 405 to 426.

³ For S. Paul's teaching, see 1 Cor. vi., Ephes. v., 1 Thess. iv. For S. Peter's warning on "behaviour seemly among the Gentiles," 1 Pet. ii. 11.

was condemned, because of its being an incentive to murder.¹ And then came murder itself, the greatest wrong that could be done, whether to the individual, or to the community.

These were the crimes which public sentiment required to be simply punished, not forgiven by the Church's authority. Being what they were, there could be no question that the proper persons to take cognisance of them were the whole number sinned against. Thus, to shut out culprits from the privileges of Christian fellowship would be virtually the act of the entire congregation. But when that had been done, a common supplication for pardon might still ascend to the ears of infinite compassion. For it does not appear that they despaired of the Divine mercy, though the Church's channels were sealed against these worst offenders.

By degrees, these reserved cases were admitted to exomologesis together with others; and were included in a list which had a natural tendency to increase in length.² Apostasy, adultery, and homicide, though they might happen to be the crimes most disturbing to public peace, did not sum up the whole of man's disobedience to his Maker; nor were they the only ones against which early Christian society stood on its guard.³ Even the Decalogue, most literally rendered, had

¹ Tertullian (*De Pudicitia*) complains of the inconsistency of treating adultery more leniently than the other two. He calls the adulterer "*idololatriæ successorem, homicidii antecessorem, utriusque collegam.*" S. Chrysostom (Hom. xxiii. in *1 Cor.*) prefers to call fornication the *mother* of idolatry, because the prelude to idolatrous rites would be acts of uncleanness. S. Augustine, though not agreeing with Tertullian, is stern enough when he has to denounce sins of the flesh:—"Adulterium sic timeate quomodo mortem; mortem, non quæ animam solvit a corpore, sed ubi anima semper ardebit cum corpore. . . . Scio fornicatoribus, adulteris . . . dicere diabolum in cordibus eorum, Non sunt magna carnis peccata. Contra hanc diaboli susurrationem debemus habere Christi Incarnationem. Hoc est unde Christianos decipit inimicus per carnis illecebras, cum eis facit lene quod grave est, lene quod asperum, dulce quod amarum est. Sed quid prodest quia Satanas facit leve, quod Christus ostendit grave?" (Serm. ccxiv: *Ad infantes.*)

² See Martene (*De Rit.* vol. ii. p. 18): "Quibus, temporis successu, longe plura adjecta sunt." The earlier lists of *capitalia*, such as that given by Hermas, (*Mandat.* viii.) or by Tertullian, (*Adv. Marcion.* iv. 9,) seem to have been compiled without much care or order.

³ S. Cyprian, (*Ep.* xi. al. xvii.) includes "*minora delicta, quæ non ad Deum committuntur.*" These are proper subjects for penance; not

prohibited at least five things besides the three above-mentioned. Prophets like Amos had denounced those who "afflicted the just, took bribes, and turned aside the poor in the gate." Who can doubt that there was room for such warnings still, in what was happening every day in the market-place of Carthage, or of Alexandria? Already indeed, and before the generation had passed away that saw JESUS in the flesh, S. James had poured forth eloquent invectives against profanity, blaspheming GOD, avarice, fraudulent oppression, and lying; while S. Paul had enumerated sixteen "works of the flesh" by which the heavenly inheritance would be forfeited.¹ So, if we could transport ourselves into the Church-assemblies of the third century, we should probably find *any* gross sins of the more obvious kind exposed to public animadversion. Exomologesis would suit the rough moral sense of those days, when there was not much apprehension that confessions would reveal secrets, and little fear, therefore, of their giving a wider vogue to scandals.

II. But that state of things could not continue for ever.

A strange interest attaches to the first age of Christianity. Conscious as they were of jealous eyes watching them from every side, those small persecuted communities must have cherished eagerly the light that had come to gladden them by the revelation of JESUS CHRIST.² If they had a corresponding horror of false brethren and renegades from the faith, one cannot wonder. Fierce indignation against such traitors had been manifested by the apostles themselves. Yet, when once the penitential discipline had been established in all its severity, there would soon begin to be a reaction against it. Even though at first the Church was blamed for undue clemency in

venial sins, yet of less gravity than the three reserved ones. "Non ad Deum" may mean "not amounting to denial of the faith."

¹ The doctrine of these great apostles is enlarged upon, with the utmost fervour, by S. Chrysostom, (Hom. lxxxvii. in *Joann.*;) ὁ γὰρ χρημάτων ἐρώων, μυρία τὸν πλοῦτον διαθήσει κακὰ, καὶ ἑαυτὸν μετ' ἐκείνων. But avarice was to S. Chrysostom always the sum of all evil, (1 Tim. vi. 9, 10,) while almsgiving was the sweetest and most fruitful of all virtues.

² On the contrast between heathen and Christian morals under the Roman Empire, see chap. vi. and the notes there. For a discriminating and impartial study of the former, see Dr. S. Dill, *From Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, book II. chap. 2.

opening the door at all, there must have been many whose hearts were moved to pity for those erring brethren whom they left weeping in the porch, while themselves went forward to claim their portion in the holy and joyful mysteries.¹ One would like to accede to Hooker's opinion, that the penitents were "greatly eased by the good construction which the charity of those times gave to such actions, wherein men's piety and voluntary care to be reconciled to GOD, did purchase them much more love, than their faults were able to procure disgrace."² If so, they would endure their sackcloth and ashes right cheerfully. But then, if so much sympathy was really felt for their condition, would not the Church be led on soon to something gentler than the public exomologesis, which, whatever its compensations, must have been a terribly stern ordeal?

Indeed, a not uncommon view is that the majority of criminals were repelled by dread and dislike of the discipline; so that, even when bishops had so far condoned their apostasy, as to admit them into the ranks of penitents, they would refuse a privilege which had been so dearly purchased. If we consider this probable, and moreover take into account the habit of delaying baptism which became increasingly common after the frequent lapses of the baptised,³ and, finally, recollect how the greater crimes, instead of being dealt with in the Church's *forum*, would more and more be transferred for judgment to secular courts, we shall perceive a number of causes contributing to diminish the importance of the older penitential system, and to substitute something else in its place.

Not that any haste was shown in abandoning public exomologesis. It is certain that that was persevered with, in the West, for centuries after it had begun to languish, or was even

¹ The Eucharistic Feast anticipates the joy of that "City of God" of which the Psalmist writes, "*Lætantium omnium habitatio est in te.*" (*Ps.* lxxxvii. 7.) See what was said in chap. iii. and the notes there.

² Hooker, book vi. chap. iv. 2.

³ The public exomologesis was for baptised persons only; although, when the catechumenate had been established, catechumens were placed in classes under the same priests who ordered the penitents; and very much of S. Cyril's Lectures (e.g. Lect. ii.) is as penitential in tone as if it had been intended for the latter.

abolished, at Constantinople. Though the most flagrant offenders were now sent for trial to the Emperor's courts, others whom the Church judged deserving of at least temporary exclusion from communion were placed under the charge of penitentiary priests, and so passed through a public discipline or confession, of which the term would generally be reached before Easter. S. Ambrose and S. Augustine both recognise this as existing in their day. S. Augustine, like others before him, speaks of the opening of penitence to grievous sinners *once*, though not more than once;¹ and would have prayers offered for such, to overcome their dread of public exposure.² Even S. Leo alludes to the old discipline, as if it were still in force. However, S. Leo is at the same time a great authority for the private or auricular confession, which was then superseding the ancient use. Taking occasion by a local scandal arising from the practice by certain bishops of reading aloud confessions made to them in writing, this great Pope strictly requires that in future the audience shall be in secret.³ From his time, therefore, the assembled faithful never listened to confessions, except when the offences were already notorious.⁴ For scandalous cases, (as when baptism had been repeated, or heathen manners resumed with idolatrous worship,) public penitence was still required; and only at its termination was reconciliation granted, the bishop restoring the penitent to communion by imposition of hands.⁵

Of the causes which contributed to keep up the old discipline, some may be traced to alarm caused by the rage of heathen persecutors, others to the disorders existing in a mixed population, largely composed of slaves, and of those by whom

¹ S. Aug. (*Ep. clii.*).

² S. Aug. (*Enchir. cap. lxxxii*; where he comments on 2 Tim. ii. 25).

³ See S. Leo, *Ep. clxviii. chap. 2*: *Ad Episcopos per Campaniam constitutos*. Also his *Ep. clix. and clxvii.*

⁴ In saying "from his time," and "in future," the author has followed what seems to be the common opinion, that these were *new* regulations, made now by S. Leo for the first time. But can we be sure of this? Had not the public discipline of penitence always been limited to the expiation of public scandals? Were not the Campanian bishops really therefore the innovators?

⁵ See Batiffol, *Orig. de la Pénitence*, p. 162.

the injunction to "follow after peace with all men" would be habitually disregarded.¹ Most of them were incidental to the decadence of the empire, and can have little interest for us of a practical kind. Much indeed can be said, now and always, in favour of the simplicity and directness of public confession, which must have seemed the natural thing to begin with, (as we saw in the last chapter). But when the times became less simple, and men more thoughtful and more sad, the retention of exomologesis on its old footing became highly inconvenient. If this was still reserved for extraordinary public scandals, the Church saw that something else would be requisite for the regular healing of sin by repentance.

"Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance." Good men soon began to be anxious not only about wicked deeds done in public, nor such as were known only to GOD and His angels; but also as to evil motives and desires, though these might not result in overt acts of sin. Our LORD had distinctly included these in the warnings of His great Sermon, and they were sure to attract attention, when people were becoming better trained in practical piety, and were able to examine themselves, and had passed beyond the rudiments.² Thus by about the beginning of the sixth century we find a careful writer like S. Cæsarius of Arles³ enlarging the list of *capitalia* to include pride, envy, hatred, unbelief; which the public conscience now began to regard as "sins unto death." So to this day, whenever the question is of what sins should be confessed, we are apt to think of the so-called "deadly seven;" all of which are in their conception secret, and to which others—more particularly sins of the intellect—might very well be added. (Traditional regard for the number seven is surely not all-important to be preserved.) The fact is that, as our LORD taught, the things

¹ Later, S. Chrysostom still contrasts the unity which CHRIST's apostles established with the discord prevailing in his own day when—*θηριῶν χαλεπώτερον πρὸς τὰ ἀλλήλων διακείμεθα μέλη*.

² S. Basil has some very clear teaching on root-sins: see *Reg. Brev.* 289.

³ See a sermon by S. Cæsarius, *De Sanctis*, in App. to vol. v. of S. Augustine.

which defile are always "what proceed from within, out of the heart of men;" *there* must the watch be set, and *there* are the defeats sustained for which reparation is made by repentance.

III. But these secret sins are not like open acts of crime, to be punished by stripes, imprisonment, or public disgrace. They are for the most part diseases, for which the treatment has to be long-continued, discriminating, and gently progressive. When they are confessed, they must either be uttered by the heart only, so that none hears but GOD; or else some person must be found specially qualified, to whom the avowal may be made very privately, with all soberness, and in the fear of GOD. It is interesting to trace the beginnings of this latter practice, so far as we are able.

The Council of Trent declares most positively, that auricular confession was observed by the Catholic Church always from the beginning.¹ Very likely this was so, though it cannot be said that we know much about it. Socrates, writing mostly on the Eastern Church, tells of nothing earlier than the institution of a penitentiary official, soon after the Decian persecution. Sozomen, on the contrary, describes what he had heard of at Rome: a custom, that is, of private confession dating from the first (ἐξ ἀρχῆς). Yet he seems to state this more as his own opinion (ὡς εἰκός) than as thoroughly ascertained. It is less important, perhaps, to enquire when exactly the custom began, than to acquaint oneself with the course it took later when it had become popular. Origen writes as a contemporary, of what was frequently done in his own day; and is in close accord with the more distant recollections of the historian. Sozomen says that it had been found too burdensome (φορτικόν) to confess all sins in public, and so the bishops appointed a presbyter, to whose judgment recourse could be had in private. Origen, writing much nearer to the time alluded to, approves the selection of a person fit to distinguish

¹ See Council of Trent, 14th Session, Can. vi.: "Si quis dixerit . . . modum secrete confitendi soli sacerdoti, quam Ecclesia Catholica ab initio semper servavit . . . alienum esse ab institutione Christi, anathema esto."

between the cases submitted to his judgment.¹ Here we see the important step arrived at (then, if not sooner), of choosing a single recipient of confessions in place of the multitude. We also see what kind of person was thought suitable. Origen recommends that great care should be taken to discover a good man, learned and merciful, a physician of souls. Sozomen says that his presbyter would be one well reported of for thoughtfulness and prudent reserve. This was no mere official to take down a statement, and give a passport. To be sure those who confessed were generally, for a long time, sent on from him to do their penance in public, the two systems being thus in a measure combined. At least, there seems little doubt that it was so at Rome, where penitentiary priests were attached to the principal basilicas, who made this their business.² But no one knows whether private confessions were by them ordered to be repeated *in full*, or—as is perhaps more probable—only so much as would determine the person's position in the ranks of penitents. And Origen almost seems to imply that, in his country, there might be another alternative besides sending them "where the whole Church was convened." But whichever way that was ruled—and certainly the public discipline was a great safeguard, and provided security for reparation being made, in many cases—we have clear evidence enough that the previous confession and conference were in private. Sozomen's "man of reserve" (ἐχέμυθον) must have been one who observed the seal of confession. Origen's "merciful physician" would respect the confidence reposed in him. A hundred years later, S. Basil rules that the soul's diseases should be revealed only to those who understand them.³ And of S. Ambrose we have a remarkable testimony from his biographer:—"As often as any confessed to him his faults, in order to receive penance (*ob percipiendam pœnitentiam*), he so wept, as to compel him, too, to weep . . . but the matter (*causas*) of the crimes, which the penitent confessed to him, he

¹ The references are: Origen, *In Ps. xxxvii.* Hom. ii.; Socrates, *Hist.* bk. v. chap. 19; Sozomen, *Hist.* bk. vii. chap. 16.

² See Mgr. Batiffol's *Études, Orig. de la Pénitence*, pp. 146, 147.

³ See S. Basil (*Reg. Brev.* 229 and 288).

spoke of to no one, except to the LORD Himself, with whom he interceded; leaving a good example to succeeding bishops, that they should rather be intercessors with GOD, than accusers among men."¹ Of S. Chrysostom, his great compassion for the guilty, and the odium he excited thereby, something will be said in a later chapter. The examples of these three Fathers are enough to prove that, certainly by the fourth century, bishops themselves were hearing confessions, and not merely pronouncing those absolved who came from the public exomologesis.

And there was a real demand for holy men to be employed in this ministry. S. Basil is full of the most benevolent thoughts for his penitents: recollecting how the people went to S. John Baptist in the wilderness, or to "show their deeds" to S. Paul at Ephesus, and earnestly longing to help his own as those were helped. One hardly knows what to say about the intercourse between lapsed persons and the so-called "martyrs" at an earlier date. S. Cyprian was obliged to note abuses, arising from what was more truly an interference, than a just and merciful observance of the Church's order.² Yet, although some of these martyrs, as it seems, had "come in no peril of death, but were lusty and strong,"³ and at the same time were criminally lax in issuing their *libelli* to unworthy applicants, that cannot always have been the case. Weak and erring souls must often have met with the best of comfort from glorious sufferers, whose own witness had never faltered, who had given everything but their lives for CHRIST. The holiest men were needed for confessors, and the early Church in great measure supplied them. Saints were in readiness, to whom treacherous revealing of secrets would be impossible: saints of GOD, who

¹ See Paulinus' *Life of S. Ambrose*, 39: "Ita flebat, ut et illum flere compelleret; videbatur enim sibi cum jacente jacere, Causas autem criminum quæ illi confitebantur, nulli nisi Domino soli, apud quem intercedebat, loquebatur; bonum relinquens exemplum posteris sacerdotibus, ut intercessores apud Deum magis sint, quam accusatores apud homines." (Quoted by Pusey in his *Preface to Gaume*.)

² See S. Cyprian *De Lapsis*, 12; also *Ep.* xxx. (or xxxvi.), which is really a letter to the saint from the Church in Rome.

³ Ps. lxxiii. 4. (*Prayer Book version*.)

would "pour oil and wine" into the terrible wounds, and restore the dying souls.

What the nature was of their remedial treatment—what the advice they offered—is not what concerns us now. The important fact is that the Primitive Church had its system of private confession, and that the confessors were the best and wisest men who could be found. The right persons, said S. Basil, are those "who have been charged with a dispensation of the mysteries of GOD: for so, of old, confessions were made before saints: the Baptist, or the apostles." He means, that those princes of the Church were not only stewards of the mysteries, but men distinguished for great personal holiness.

IV. We shall see in the following chapters how all the more grievous sins, if remissible, were thought to necessitate the use of ministerial absolution, commonly known as the power of the keys. But let us first speak of a different class of penitents. Apart from those who came as offenders against the Divine commandments, we find many pious persons seeking out the eminent saints, that they might profit by their ghostly counsel. The spiritual guidance of devout people had a large place in the employment of those good Fathers; as may be seen from numberless letters that have come down to our time. These letters are among the most precious legacies bequeathed to the Church by the great early writers. They show the brighter side of primitive Christian society. We see here how, if "works of the flesh" were manifested on one hand (in a society still more than half heathen), on the other, there was no lack of "saintly maidens," to fast and pray and frequent the sacraments, nor of "godly matrons" who strove to bring up their children in the faith of JESUS crucified. One thinks of Monica's veneration for Ambrose, of Augustine counselling Proba, Jerome with his noble Roman ladies, Chrysostom sending comfort to the loyal and much tried Olympias—saintly disciples stablished and strengthened by saintly teachers. Difficult points of doctrine, or obscure passages in the Bible, would be discussed in these letters; or questions arising from divergent ecclesiastical customs: but all would tend to the more confirmation of the faith, and a larger growth

in holiness. Nor were women the only enquirers. Governors and magistrates would be indebted to bishops for advice befitting their station.¹ And sometimes a friendship between good men would be made the occasion for mutual uplifting; as, notably, in the correspondence of Basil, Gregory, and Amphilochius. However, there was nothing in all this that was very peculiar to the times. The reasons for seeking ghostly counsel would be what they always are with earnest Christians, whose aim is to live for the greater glory of GOD, and who therefore desire that the stronger should bear the infirmities of the weaker. But the old rules were peculiar in some respects: as we shall soon see.

It does not appear that devout people were then wont to apply to their spiritual guides for confession.² That was kept for the worst offenders, and was not proposed to pious souls aiming at perfection. On the other hand, much is to be learned from the Fathers on the treatment of those daily faults, from which not the best of men can be exempt. Daily faults did not separate the soul from habitual grace: they were for the most part sins of infirmity, by which the child of GOD was not precluded from access to his heavenly FATHER. S. Augustine is never tired of insisting on the privilege which belongs to the baptised, of obtaining remission by the daily and devout use of the LORD'S Prayer. "Eorum est enim dicere Pater noster, etc., qui jam Patri tali regenerati sunt ex aqua et Spiritu."³ S. Chrysostom had taken exactly the same line.⁴ S. Leo exhorts the faithful in Rome to prepare for their Easter Communion by united prayer with mutual intercession; as if that alone was requisite.⁵ This is certainly remarkable, at

¹ Take, for instance, the correspondence of S. Augustine with Marcellinus, or Honoratus.

² See a French writer quoted by Batiffol, *Études*, p. 213:—"Nous voyons les Pères assigner aux péchés véniels d'autres remèdes que la confession . . . Alors, les pieux fidèles, et même les saints . . . n'ayant pas commis de péché mortel depuis le baptême, (qu'en général ils avaient reçu assez tard,) ne se confessaient jamais."

³ See S. Aug. (*Enchir.* cap. lxxi.; *Hom.* lvi. in S. Joann.).

⁴ See S. Chrys. (*Hom.* xix. in S. Matt.):—πιστοῖς αὐτῇ ἢ προσευχῇ προσήκει. ὁ γὰρ ἀμύητος οὐκ ἂν δύναίτο πατέρα καλεῖν τὸν Θεόν.

⁵ See S. Leo (*Serm.* lxxxviii. *De Jejun. sept. mensis*, iii.). This is discussed in Bishop Gore's *Life of the Saint*, in the *Dict. Chr. Biography*.

a season when now, even in our English Church, it is usual to propose confession to the careful consideration of all intending communicants. Confession is not mentioned in S. Leo's sermon, although he supposes that some of his flock may have rather serious blemishes (*maculas crassiores*) of which to rid themselves. Origen, whose roads to repentance and pardon are manifold, suggests the way of martyrdom among others, as conducive to a holy peace with GOD.¹ That was likely enough in his day, when persecution was rife; and probably he intended to hold out the same hope to penitents already baptised, as the "baptism in blood" afforded to those who had not had access to the font. But for communicants, in good standing, and at quiet times, it would suffice that they should betake themselves to prayer with almsgiving; adding to these forgiveness of injuries (if they had any to forgive), and doing their utmost to convert others "from the power of Satan unto GOD."² Not that the Fathers approved of carelessness: they never made light of any sins committed by the regenerate, great or small. But only after the more grievous crimes was confession deemed to be imperative.

V. We cannot import these rules and principles into our own times without alteration. In several respects we are apt to think differently now, both as regards the necessity of confession, and the place which spiritual guidance should occupy in the pursuit of holiness. As to necessity, the English Church, of course, has never recognised an absolute obligation to "open one's grief" to another, even after the worst crimes committed: and most of our contemporaries never hear the practical question so much as mooted. Earnest-minded people are thus led to an increased sense of private personal responsibility, and set aside the old sharp distinctions between

¹ See Origen (Hom. ii. 4 in *Levit.*).

² S. Aug. (Serm. cccliii. 7), enjoins forgiveness of injuries. S. Chrys. (*De Pœnit.* Hom. iii.), enlarges on the duty of almsgiving: (ἐλεημοσύνην τῇ βασιλίδι τῶν ἀρετῶν). Both this Father (*De Incompreh. Dei Nat.* v. 7), and Cassian (*Confer.* xx. 8), make much of daily prayer. But S. Augustine will not have it supposed that almsgiving can atone for greater sins. (See *De Civ. Dei.* xxi. 27.) And of the LORD's Prayer he says, "*Justificatis utique discipulis loquebatur [Dominus]*".

what is bad and what is very bad. Besides, there is great reluctance felt under any circumstances to giving over one's conscience to a stranger when the only reason is that there is guilt upon it. If that guilt be supposed heavy, still, most men will think that they can manage their own affairs best. Again, they seldom apply the word unpardonable to anything that they have done; and there is no discipline in these days to make them afraid. This state of mind savours a good deal of what was discussed in the two first chapters; but it is in fact almost inseparable from our modern inner consciousness. In the Roman Church, indeed, all accept confession as the indispensable condition for obtaining communion; but while all accept their Church's ruling, not many perhaps feel as if personal responsibility were much lightened thereby. This is one way in which we differ considerably from the old ideas and customs.

But what concerns us more at present is a change in the opposite direction. If we resent having confession forced upon us for our worst misdemeanours, we are inclined sometimes to resort to it when the fault has been trifling—when the Fathers would have said, perhaps, Pray, and give alms; but would have let confession alone.

We may hope that there is no difference in respect of prayer. The direct intercourse with heaven was cultivated in primitive times, and it is cultivated still. "Our FATHER" is still the prayer of the baptised. "Forgive us our trespasses," with the condition attendant upon that, is all that we are required to plead for pardon of lesser faults. All Christians are united in this holy practice. It would be simply untrue to say that it is more characteristic of one party in the Church than another. We may fear, perhaps, that prayer is less general than it used to be: but, even so, the principle has not been abandoned. Though with hours shortened, and rules of mortification in part evaded, we fall on our knees at eventide, and send up a cry from our hearts—

"Forgive me, LORD, for Thy dear SON,
The ill that I this day have done;
That with the world, myself, and Thee,
I, ere I sleep, at peace may be."

But the difference is just this:—that, besides prayer, many earnest Christians now practise auricular confession of common daily faults. There is no such firm dividing line between two classes of sin as used to be marked in ancient times. In theory it may exist still, or even in the language of the Prayer Book; but scarcely in practice. Very many members of the English Church choose for themselves a religion strongly individualistic; and these reject confession, even for the greatest faults that can be committed. But others are so far from agreeing with them, that they will not allow themselves even that dispensation which the Fathers certainly did allow. Instead of merely asking advice of their spiritual guides with a view to greater perfection, they rest their case upon faults to which they have just owned in confession—not regarding these as of the most deadly kind, yet without much distinction observed, of less or greater.

It will be well to consider two things. First, whether this change of custom is for the good of those who adopt it: and, if it is, then, secondly, what sort of counsellors will be best under the altered conditions.

At the end of the last chapter, three reasons were given in favour of “confessing one’s sins before a duly qualified hearer.” The consideration of the first named, which introduced absolution, was deferred then, and must still be deferred for a little longer. Whether absolution can be rightly given upon recital of common daily faults, is a rather difficult question. But the second and third reasons would appear to apply equally to all kinds of confessions, so long as the faults would, if unconfessed, either endanger the soul by self-deceit, or confuse and sadden it by perplexity. If, through keeping all troubles to oneself, one is likely either to seek comfort in a false peace, or to miss one’s next step because one cannot see the way, it must be better surely to let another judge of one’s condition. And he can hardly judge, unless he knows through confession the full extent of the difficulties proposed to his notice.

But, some may object, did not saints of old give advice freely without confession? Yes, it would seem so. But may

not this be the solution, that the daily difficulties and perplexities of life are so much *increased* in our day, that pious and earnest Christians do really feel greater need of a thorough direction? It would be an evil were they to seek it too often; but when it is given, it should be of a kind suited to the human nature of to-day—that strangely eager, anxious, often despondent humanity which is the product of an advanced civilisation like our own. It is not enough now to say, simply, “Father, I have sinned.” The temptations to those faults will recur again, and one wants to know what to do beforehand. Else, through the fierce heat of their assault, and under a darkening sky, one may quickly lose one’s way.

And life is very full of difficulties. The following instances are to some extent typical of what confront the average Christian, in his (or her) continual warfare:—

(1) The pressure of infidelity is perhaps greater now than in the worst period of the eighteenth century—worse than when Bishop Butler complained that “Christianity is not so much as an object of inquiry; all being agreed to treat it as a fiction, which must no longer interrupt the pleasures of the world.”^{*} The vulgar scoffing of those times was less dangerous than a contempt which is almost courteous. For now, under the shield of language which is never coarse, and very seldom ill-tempered, men push forward their attack with the utmost boldness to the very citadel of orthodox belief. So the unwary listen, and before they realise that any harm is intended, find that they have lost all. But can, then, the intellect be hardened by the use of penitence? or will a perplexed spirit be better able to “stand fast in the faith” because he has made confession of his sins and taken counsel thereon? The answer is not quite easy; because the sort of counsellors required to deal with sceptical difficulties are not, certainly, to be found everywhere. Yet advice ought to be sought; and if nothing else were gained by confession at such a time, it would be an immense help to *sincerity*. And sincerity of intention is of all things essential for holding one’s ground against artfully prepared objections. Besides, every spiritual

^{*} See the Advertisement to *Butler’s Analogy*.

guide would be sure to invite to prayer ; and nothing is so apt to scatter the clouds as that.

(2) Take next the perils of idleness. As is sure to happen in a wealthy country like our own, numbers of persons enjoy a large amount of leisure ; women particularly. The danger for them is obvious. Having so many idle hours to dispose of, they spend their energies on unsatisfying trifles, to the detriment of sober moral choice. It might almost be said that these fall victims to conspiracies against the freedom of the will. We hear even of a search after occult influences, the "illusions of art magick,"¹ as not too shameful for souls that were made GOD'S children in their baptism. Then we come to "killing time" by card-playing, with all the absurdities of insane gambling. A more wide-spread evil still is the perpetual dallying with works of fiction. Splendidly good, no doubt, are some of the modern novels ; but yet it is true that novels which simply amuse and edify have almost ceased to be written. In those of the less worthy sort, we have much of extravagance, headlong fancies indulged,² situations which if they really occurred would be the tempter's overwhelming victories, vice rendered, in the painting, not so much attractive as irresistible. Or, again, there are stories written with a deliberate purpose to subserve, now a particular phase of unbelief, now the passing of some immoral Bill through Parliament: this with much eager special pleading, and gross injustice to the motives of opponents. Then, we have to consider that this kind of literature is being rained down upon thousands of English homes, which are, for their principal inmates, mere palaces of idleness. It may be that the majority of novel-readers are wives and daughters of the middle class, who should rather be reckoned among the most industrious of Englishwomen. Still, it is to be feared that these have very open minds to imbibe fallacies—more so, indeed,

¹ Μαγικῆς ἐμπαλῦματα τέχνης. (Wisdom xvii. 7.)

² To which, happily, one *cannot* apply Browning's line—

"Fancy with fact is just one fact the more."

(*The Ring and the Book*, 464.)

So far from being true to facts, the situations are for the most part utterly incredible. Yet a successful novelist has claimed a "purifying" influence for fiction. Sometimes—but how often?

than their sisters of higher rank. Half-educated accountants or shop-girls can offer no intellectual barrier to the amazing confidence with which assent is demanded for these cunning theories; while the enormous circulation shows how many myriads of our thoughtless people are pleased with the worst of what is published. Not all, truly, will be led astray: not the wise, the modest, the pure-minded:—

“ So dear to Heaven is saintly chastity
That when a soul is found sincerely so
A thousand liveried angels lackey her,
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt.

She that has that, is clad in complete steel,” etc.¹

But it is no easy matter to “walk warily in these dangerous days.”² One might almost say of many of the modern books, with their evil solicitation, “The man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear.”³ And the best hope of immunity from harm is for those who by preparing regularly for confession, keep watch over wayward impulses and fancies.

(3) But there are many more persons in England who are busy, than idle: and these are less likely to be led astray by the delights of a fictitious paradise. Erratic fancies are not their weakness. If they have not surrendered personal predilections to the necessity of a life of labour, they have schooled themselves into consenting to regular maxims of their trade, or of their profession. Yet, in submitting to this bondage, they are apt to bear uneasy consciences within their breasts. Things are expected of them which, as Christians, they resent, and would refuse if they dared. Perhaps the usual escape is in a forced forgetfulness. It would be horrible, anyhow, if they were “turned as clay to the seal”⁴ to receive each impression as it came. Covetousness is supposed to be a sin of which no man ever repented. But that is scarcely true. Many, whose lot is cast in the midst of crooked dealing, would long intensely to follow truth and righteousness, if only they knew how. The

¹ Milton's *Comus* (“Speech of Elder Brother”).

² See the Commination Office. ³ 2 Sam. xxiii. 7. ⁴ Job xxxviii. 14.

great difficulty lies in the implication of so many traders in the dishonesty of their principals. All responsibility is shared. Modern merchants are not like Zacchæus, who, if he chose to "restore four-fold," had nothing to hinder him, directly his own mind was made up. And if independent action is hardly possible for heads of firms, how much less for juniors and subordinates! Hence the simply secular lives of so many. They can make no profession of religion, while their business is what it is.

These are specimens of perplexities caused by our complex and artificial modern existence. As the resources of civilisation are multiplied, temptations increase with them. The new amusements are so many fresh inroads upon the freedom of the will, disturbing the soul from a simple following of CHRIST. Commercial speculations cannot be carried through without much of fraud and false pretence; and where most successful, they load a man with the burden of enormous wealth, for which he is accountable to Almighty GOD. It is useless, then, to pretend that, in times like these, every one ought to stand alone. We shall have to take a firm line hereafter against the *habit* of leaning on direction: but that cannot alter the fact that we are placed—perhaps for the whole of our active life—among snares and labyrinths incalculable. Surely, therefore, it is important, even though not of all things most important, that one should know where to find a guide and comforter who may be trusted.

Hitherto, while much has been said about the person receiving confidences or confessions—his qualifications, his discernment, his reticence, his diverse treatment of matters, great or small, that may be brought to him—we have refrained from defining his office and authority. But everybody knows that, in the Primitive Church, he was always either a priest or a bishop.¹ That, in itself, would not necessitate the same

¹ For instance, Tertullian (*De Pudic.* xviii. 17) speaks of a repentance "quæ levioribus delictis veniam ab episcopo consequi poterit." Here Mgr. Batiffol's comment is, "C'est, à notre connaissance, la première fois dans la littérature chrétienne qu'il est fait si explicitement mention de l'intervention de l'évêque dans la remission des péchés." But,

custom among ourselves. But must we not be convinced that, for present needs, it is even more requisite, that he should be one of the ordained ministers of JESUS CHRIST?

Let us speak with all due caution. A priest is not the only *possible* person. In Chapter ii. was noticed the strong inclination that most good Protestants have to keep spiritual intercourse within the sanctuary of the home circle. In that case, the confidant would generally be one of the parents. Could any better arrangement be thought of? Now, it would seem that this must depend on how far the confidence is desired to extend, and how long to last. One may believe—and believe firmly—that, in numberless Christian homes, the HOLY SPIRIT of counsel speaks by the lips of the father or mother; and that their children may well “rise up and call” such parents “blessed.” Yet the question must be whether the *average* home is like this: whether under every roof are to be found wise and merciful and experienced guides of souls. Maternal affection, though so pure and tender, is sometimes tainted with partiality; Rebekah was no true counsellor to Jacob; and the mother of Louis IX, though she trained him to be a saint, pursued with unkind jealousy his queen, her daughter-in-law. Besides, “man goeth forth to his work and to his labour.” Neither sons nor daughters will remain through life at their father’s house; nor will the mother’s letters always be delivered at those moments when the demand for counsel is most urgent. Finally, the faults which mar the children’s career after infancy will often take shapes not indeed unfamiliar but for various reasons unfit to be presented to the parents’ notice. S. Monica was not, and could not have been, the only agent in the conversion of S. Augustine. This is a point which requires no arguing. And it applies with double force to conferences of men with pious women who are *not* near relations.

The essential things are that the person resorted to should be (1) discreet and learned in this kind of science; (2) set

if Tertullian mentions bishops, did not others before him imply the instrumentality of presbyters, though not quite so distinctly? See, for instance, S. Clement, (*Ep. to the Corinthians*, chap. lvii. 1); S. Polycarp (*Ad Philipp.* cap. vi. 1).

apart and consecrated by his office; (3) in virtue of that office, bound to attend to all who present themselves; and (4) one who will not betray the confidence reposed in him.¹ In every part of the world some one should be at hand to deserve this trust, and to respond to this demand; so that souls "weary and heavy-laden," though parted far from the home of childhood, may never have far to go to seek their rest. To him they may come sometimes when disturbed by the wild fancies current around them. From him they may gain suggestions as to books to be read, or to be avoided. And when the good seed is like to be choked among thorns, through continual stress of business, this true friend may succeed in showing a way to escape even from that temptation. To a great extent we must "bear every man his own burden," and trust to the spiritual armour received by each at his Confirmation: it would be impracticable, if it were not unwise, for busy people to ask leave of a director for each step before they take it. And yet, in cases of extreme distress, might not something be gained if, instead of going to those actually concerned in keeping up a fraud, one could open his trouble by confession to a different sort of adviser—a man whose calling emancipates him from all fetters of commercial insincerity, and who, together with the authority, represents in a measure the poverty, of JESUS CHRIST? In the priest he would find at all events a disinterested hearer.

Very often, however, those who seek help from their clergy are neither outcasts nor grievously hindered and perplexed, but the most exemplary members of their flocks.² Still, it is right

¹ What a beautiful picture is the following, of an old Northumbrian saint! "This true man of God [S. Cuthbert] penetrated into the wildest valleys, and attracted 'shepherdless sheep' by the fascination of his presence and his words. So great was his skill in speaking, so intense his eagerness to make his persuasions successful, such a glow lighted up his angelic face, that no one of those present dared to hide from him the secrets of his heart: all revealed openly, by confession, what they had done; for in truth they supposed that he must needs be aware of those very deeds of theirs; and after confession they wiped away their sins at his bidding, by worthy fruits of repentance." (Quoted from Venerable Bede, by Canon Bright in his *Early English Church History*, chap. vii.)

² Like those of whom S. Gregory the Great writes, "Sunt plerique iusti, in quorum vita tantum est [Dei] gaudium, ut eis quælibet peccatorum

that they should hear good words which may strengthen them, and right that the priest should speak, as to those who have a care like his own for the highest interests of souls. Church-workers are ten times better if from time to time they lay their over-taxed patience, their dissatisfaction, their too eager criticism, at the feet of infinite Love, claiming also that seasonable help which it is the pastor's duty to convey. All that they know, he knows: there is the same trial to him as to them: yet he meets them with what is better than sympathy, bearing as he does a charge in CHRIST'S Name to "lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and to make straight paths for the feet."

The clergy are not all deserving. Were more prayer bestowed upon them—less of wholesale censure, more of candid and brotherly criticism—they would perhaps display a greater meekness of wisdom, and abound more in that earnestness which few are without, yet very few have as much of as S. Paul would have approved. But the point is that, in spite of shortcomings, they are the proper persons to act for CHRIST'S people. When they hear confessions, they do but bring home to individuals the same exhortations which they address to the crowd from the pulpit. The same education and skill are serviceable for both offices. In both, they practice the science of the Cross; seeking and saving, through the one message that enlightens, heals, restores. This is the great work to which the clergy have been sent, one and all. This was the intention of their Ordination:—"The Church and Congregation whom you must serve is CHRIST'S Spouse, and His Body. If it shall happen the same Church, or any member thereof, to take hurt or hindrance by reason of your negligence, ye know the greatness of the fault. . . . Wherefore see that you never cease your labour, your care and diligence, until you have done all that lieth in you, according to your bounden duty, to bring all such as are committed to your charge, unto that agreement in the faith

pœnitentia præponi nullatenus possit." They are they who humble themselves for sins of thought, though persevering in right action; and humble themselves more than others do for evil deeds. For these there is indeed "joy in heaven." (S. Greg. lib. ii. Hom. xxxiv. in S. Luc. xv.)

and knowledge of GOD, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in CHRIST, that there be no place left among you, either for error in religion, or for viciousness in life."¹

It is altogether impossible that so weighty a charge can be accepted and fulfilled except by pastors who meet their people one by one, and treat them according to their several requirements, whether in their spiritual health or in sickness. They must be shepherds who know their sheep, and are known of them.

Thus far, then, the conclusion is in favour of confession to the priest as the proper adviser, even though the things confessed be chiefly lesser matters, which the Fathers would have been content to have mentioned only in private prayer. It has been thought that this change is warranted by the altered circumstances of the age we live in, when difficulties and perplexities increase daily around our path. But let it be observed, once more, that we have not yet introduced the ministry of Absolution. Before coming to that, we should take a little more pains to understand what the Church has ruled as to the great or deadly sins: a subject which will occupy our attention in the following chapter.

¹ From the Form of Ordering of Priests in the Ordinal appended to our Book of Common Prayer.

CHAPTER VI.

Primitive Penitence for Greater or Deadly Sins.

ACCORDING to the view taken in the last chapter, of the use of auricular confession, its whole object might have been to profit by the advice of a wise spiritual guide. For it is obvious that, the more such a true friend has been allowed to become acquainted with one's special trials and perplexities, the more justly he may claim submission to his charitable counsels. One need not, then, be surprised if confession on this basis is much resorted to at the present time. It may be as good a way to secure direction—if that is the one thing desired—as any other. However, when direction is made the sole object, the duty of confessing to *God* is in some danger of being forgotten; and then, will the confessions made be very real? Surely a penitent may feel that he has absolute discretion, and can reveal as many of his faults, or as few, as he pleases. The discretion would do no harm to a humble-minded person, because he would be much too honest to save himself trouble by concealment. But some, surely, would imagine themselves standing at a high spiritual level; and their confessions would be meagre as the Pharisee's.

Besides, confession which ends only in advice is not proper for clergy to engage in by virtue of their sacred calling. It may be most convenient that they should do so (for the reasons that we have seen already); but, *cæteris paribus*, any prudent and charitable Christian might give such counsel as is commonly required.

I. But to obtain direction is neither the sole object, nor a principal part of the object, of going to confession. This is not

said as retracting anything, or minimising the perplexities which beset earnest people. But the right end of Confession is Absolution.¹ It must be the business of the next chapter to make a careful study of what absolving means. Let it suffice for the present to say that the sins which GOD requires His children to confess are to be regarded as a serious burden or bondage, from which there is no escape but by His own authoritative deliverance. All the advice in the world would not avail without this. We go to Confession that we may be delivered from the guilt of our sins by Absolution.

This should be borne in mind by all who resort to the practice. One cannot indeed deny that very slight faults are now made the substance of confession offered by good people at stated seasons—confessions to which a simple prayer with blessing might be thought a more appropriate termination. The Fathers would have considered that to be enough. But perhaps the tendency of our English Prayer Book is to bring these lighter matters within reach of the Church's absolving power. That must be so, at least, if what the priest pronounces at the daily Office be a true Absolution. When we consider this question later on, we shall see that the intention there is a little doubtful.² But so far as those words at Matins do convey a real deliverance, we must think that their benefit would extend to common daily faults.³ And so, perhaps, our people

¹ So Mr. Drury says, with his wonted fairness:—"Confession and Absolution are complementary acts; and if Confession be sincere, it is as inseparable from Absolution, as the convex from the concave side of a circle." (*Confession and Absolution*, p. 109.) I should not have ventured to go quite so far as this; for confession of sins (in some form) seems to me to be among the *στοιχεῖα*, while ministerial absolution is a later accessory, highly useful and gracious, yet not indispensable to the former.

² See Postscript II. to chap. vii., and the Appendix which follows there. Many, no doubt, take that in Matins for a real absolution. Hence the common custom of facing towards the people to pronounce it—a custom which has no support from the rubric. Sancroft said that people who prayed for William III. should have a second absolution at the end of the service, *besides that at the beginning!* (See Plumptre's *Life of Bp. Ken*, ii. p. 74.)

³ Mr. Drury quotes the Puritan Fulke saying, "The minister hath authority to remit sins, not only to them that be sick, but also to them that be whole; and daily doth pronounce the Absolution," etc. These words sound kindly, although perhaps "authority to remit" meant much less to Fulke than it does to us.

have learned to come to their private auricular confessions with the same motive: accounting no guilt of theirs too small to be brought under the authority of this word. We remember, of course, that "to whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required." That is thought equitable between man and man; and no less can be expected when actions are weighed in the scales of heaven. A servant, therefore, who has long known his Divine Master's will—and have not we, in the English Church?—is bound to judge himself very strictly, even for slight instances of disobedience. Probably that was what S. Francis de Sales meant, when teaching that "venial sins furnish matter for sacramental absolution."¹ He referred to things which would have been venial for ignorant people or beginners; but which assume a graver complexion when they are the faults of regular communicants. In persons thus highly favoured, repentance should be ever deepening. "It seems to the purer soul that it needs for itself a work of cleansing grace, as deep and searching as the most fallen can need: not that there is no difference in sins, but that the least fault in the eyes of the more saintly appears a worse evil, than deadly sin appears to the more fallen."² So, if it be an error, it is erring on the safer side, when the solemn reconciliation is sought for under conditions like these.

Nevertheless, our Church draws a distinction between the great and the small; and seems to require that the former *only* should be matter for (what is called) "sacramental" confession, with absolution.³ Examples of this rarely occur. But, on two occasions, the most solemn that can be in a soul's probation, the private ministration by a priest to individual penitents is both plainly described and strenuously urged. The first is before coming to feed on CHRIST'S Body and Blood in the most blessed Sacrament; the second, before going to meet our Judge in another world. Then, our English

¹ *Esprit de S. François de Sales*, E.T. p. 53.

² *Sermons* by Canon T. T. Carter, p. 93.

³ See note on Penitence as a sacrament, near the end of Chap. i. "Sacramental confession" is the term commonly employed among Church people, though not in the Prayer Book.

Church says definitely, "Open your grief:" "make special confession of your sins." She does not say so to all alike; but either to those dying persons who "feel their consciences troubled by any weighty matter," or those intending communicants who, having "transgressed the rule of GOD's commandments," whether by actual crimes or habitual malice of will, "cannot quiet their own consciences therein." That is evidently the intention. Grievous sinners are to confess to the priest, and from him to obtain "the benefit of absolution."¹ "Ghostly counsel and advice" are also specified: but these can hardly be understood here as bearing on the higher life, because they must refer only to the grave transgressions "by will, word, or deed," which have been confessed. The exhortation in our Prayer Book is not addressed to those who are believed to be in a state of grace, going on unto perfection.

II. Now this is an old distinction between mortal and venial. There must, of course, be gradations of guilt; according to the degrees of mischief inherent in various kinds of wrong-doing; the presence, or absence, of deliberate malice; the doer's perception of consequences. Most of this is discernible by a man's natural moral sense. Again, by the Law of Moses, not only were the chief offences ranked together under two Tables, but penalties were measured by the criminal's intention, or the condition of the person injured.² But, among Christians, the doctrine of mortal or deadly sins was founded always on a verse of S. John:—"If any man see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and GOD will give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: not concerning this do I say that he should make request. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death." If this is a solitary text, it contains nevertheless a statement which the apostle plainly intended to be

¹ A study of the rubrics and exhortations in our Communion Office leads to the conclusion that the clergy are set as guardians of holy things on God's behalf. In the intention of our Church they have a charge like the Levites, who pitched their tents around the Tabernacle, lest any who were unclean should approach to worship.

² See Leviticus iv., and following chapters.

authoritative, and which is calculated to arrest the attention of all who hear it. From the time that that Epistle was penned, there could be no doubt of the distinction of sins, or the distinctive treatment required for those in each category.

Two things were left to the Church's prudent discretion. First, what sins were these "sins unto death?" And, secondly, were they remissible by any other means, if not by the Church's pardon?

How the first of these points was settled in the earliest period we have seen already. Three reserved sins were the mortal ones to begin with. But others were soon added, and were held little less scandalous and destructive than the first. We noted the sternness of the discipline (when discipline was conceded), and how it has been thought that comparatively few of the guilty can have had courage to face it.¹ The early Christians knew nothing of our modern sensitiveness; and acquiesced in punishments which sound to us appalling, both by the pain while they lasted, and the almost interminable duration in certain cases.

Much gentler views prevailed in course of time; and yet deadly sins were never reckoned on the same level, nor corrected with the same mildness, as venial.²

We have seen how the great crimes were dreaded for the injury they did to corporate Christian life. We must now consider their relation to baptismal grace.

It is evident that the early Fathers were a good deal perplexed what to do about sins occurring after baptism.³ We

¹ Origen proposes seven ways of repentance, and sets this last of the seven as most formidable of all. As for Tertullian, a tenth part of what he describes in the *De Penitentia* would be horrible. His "lacrymari et mugire dies noctesque" might very well suggest an asylum of lunatics!

² I am not aware that the "sin against the HOLY GHOST" was ever brought under the Church's discipline. Nor, probably, what Bishop Andrewes calls τὰ ἐξ πρόδρομα τῆς κατὰ Πνεύματος ἀγίου; all of which (as enumerated by Newman) were spiritual sins, such as despair, presumption, cavilling at the truth, and obstinate impenitence.

³ The awful warning in Heb. x. 26, 27 would be well remembered. Of course, that φοβερὰ τις ἐκδοχή κρίσεως is for those who *continue* wilfully to sin after initiation (ἐκουσίως ἀμαρτανόντων): not for those who sin, and afterwards repent. But the tremendous flames of Divine wrath are felt to be very near, when we listen to these verses.

should remember that the cases for which they had to provide were chiefly of persons baptised when of full age. The custom of postponing the sacrament of initiation has been alluded to as tending to narrow the field for public penitence. But we must now think of those persons who, having at last been regenerated as adults, had subsequently fallen. The facts as to the age of candidates are not quite clear. For instance, the most ancient fonts are not much earlier than Constantine; and their shape would have served for either infants or men of full stature. The frescoes in the catacombs rarely depict this function, and afford very little assistance.¹ What appears most probable is, that infants were often presented during the earliest period, but not so commonly from the middle of the third century. Thenceforward, the greater number were kept back, to choose for themselves when they came to riper years.² The institution of the catechuminate, with its grades, about that time, marks a growing disposition to defer the sacrament. Then, very soon, followed that great defection under the Decian persecution, which inspired such widespread alarm. After that, S. Cyprian still had the courage to urge that infants of the youngest age should be brought,³ and the custom rooted itself by degrees, so far as Numidia and Mauretania were concerned.⁴ But the indications are that a contrary use

¹ The earliest representation is said to be that from the cemetery of S. Calixtus, in which the baptised is a youth. (See Mr. Wharton Marriott's article on "Baptism," in Smith's *Dict. Chr. Antiquities*.) The custom probably was, as depicted there, to baptise adults by affusion, with immersion of the feet only: submersion would come in later. In that case, the shallowness of ancient fonts would present no difficulty.

² S. Irenæus (II. chap. xxii. 4), certainly includes "infantes et parvulos" among those who "renascuntur ad Deum." But Tertullian, a little later, advocates the discontinuance of infant baptism.

³ See S. Cyprian (*Ep.* lix., or lxiv.: being the *Synodical Letter of a Council of Carthage*, A.D. 253). It is to be observed, that Carthage soon became virtually a patriarchal See. Thus Canon i. of the *Synod of Hippo*, A.D. 393, requires that "all African provinces shall be guided by the Church of Carthage." (Quoted from Hefele.)

⁴ S. Augustine (*Serm.* ccxiii.) says, "Infantes isti, quos cernitis exterius dealbatos, interiusque mundatos, qui candore vestium splendorem mentium præfigurant," etc. These "infantes," however, were old enough to receive instruction. But elsewhere (*De Genesi*, lib. x.), he speaks of parents running to receive the grace of Holy Baptism for their little ones.

prevailed elsewhere ; and particularly in the Eastern provinces. So late as A.D. 404, at a great Paschal function at Constantinople, we read that about three thousand adult catechumens were expected.¹ This is the more remarkable, because the New Rome had never been a heathen city to the same extent as the ancient capital ;² and when we remember that nearly eighty years had elapsed since the foundation by Constantine, we can see that most of these candidates must have been born of Christian parents.

Facts like these point to a real anxiety felt by the Primitive Church in respect of the baptismal adoption. To us, modern Englishmen, that is an almost forgotten source of distress. We are inclined to think much better of human nature unaided, and to place less reliance on supernatural transformation. We are not curious about inward changes wrought from above. We think, perhaps, that signs of improvement are not lacking, but we trace these to causes other than, even prior to, the sacraments ; and the Church is no longer, to our view, a plot of holy ground, fair and beautiful amid a howling wilderness. Very different was the consciousness of the persecuted early Christians.³ To them it must have been a welcome thought, and constantly cherished, that they might walk with GOD'S angels, though in the fiery furnace ;⁴ nay, that their ascended LORD Himself might regard them with satisfaction ; that they should be that fearless "little flock," to whom it was "the FATHER'S good pleasure to give the kingdom." "This is my resting-place for

S. Chrysostom (Hom. xiii. in *Heb.*), is strong against postponement of baptism by catechumens till the approach of death. Yet both he and S. Gregory Nazianzen on the whole discourage infant baptism : (though, in *Orat.* xl., of the latter, chap. xvii. should be compared with xxviii.) Both these saints were themselves baptised as adults.

¹ See Palladius' *Life of S. Chrysostom*, chap. ix.

² Theodoret (*Hist.* i. 16), gives a letter of Constantine :—"In the city which bears our name, a great number of persons have, through the providential care of God the Saviour, been adopted into the holy Church."

³ It is interesting to compare what Apologists say on the blessedness and privileges of Christians, with a passage like Col. i. 11, and following verses.

⁴ See Alban Butler on the *Dedication of S. Michael*, with special reference to a church built by Constantine.

ever: here will I dwell, for I have a delight therein." There was real passionate longing in those days to remain true to the character that He had once impressed:—"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." And their hopes were centered in that new birth which the great "Teacher come from GOD" had set in the forefront of His Gospel, to be the true possession of His redeemed, through "water and the HOLY SPIRIT." So to stand forth before the eyes of the heathen "an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for GOD'S own possession, to show forth the excellencies of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvellous light."

In fact, baptism came to be regarded as not merely the initiation, but the crisis, of a Christian's life. S. Basil¹ and others insist upon a vital change in the soul that is thus made partaker of the death, burial, and resurrection of JESUS CHRIST. Schemes of doctrine were drawn up, and delivered to catechumens by regular oral instruction, that they might come to the Font with an enlightened faith, and wills surrendered to the obedience of CHRIST.² It was always hoped that baptism (particularly if completed by the laying on of hands), would be the seal of a sincere conversion, corresponding to the soul's renewal by water and the HOLY GHOST. Thus the deterioration and degradation that sin effects would be characteristic only of the years before, not after, baptism.³ Sins might have been ever so many in the unregenerate state; "but after that life-giving water succoured me"—says S. Cyprian—"washing away the stain of former years, . . . to sin no more has come of faith, as heretofore to sin had come of human error."⁴ The newly-baptised had passed through the gate of death to a glorious resurrection in CHRIST: he had been "sometime darkness, but now he was light in the LORD," and

¹ S. Basil (*De Bapt.* ii. qu. 1).

² See, here, the famous *Lectures* by S. Cyril of Jerusalem. See also Justin Martyr's interesting account of the preparation for baptism. (*Apol.* i. 61.)

³ On confession before baptism, see S. Cyril's *Lectures* i. 5.

⁴ S. Cyprian (*Ad Donat.* 3) who, however, also strongly advocated the baptism of infants, in Christian families. See above.

must "walk as a child of light." "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body." "Sin shall not have dominion over you." All that boldness of hope which S. Paul had imparted to the disciples in Rome was infused into the patristic teaching on the new life of GOD'S adopted children. "By the HOLY SPIRIT," says S. Basil,¹ "paradise is restored, we ascend to the kingdom of heaven, we return to the adoption of sons: we have confidence given to call GOD our FATHER, to be made partakers of the grace of CHRIST, children of light, and heirs of eternal glory: in a word, to be filled with all fulness of blessing."

Even when making their defence to heathens, the early Christians would boast of their divine descent. "Christians," says the Apologist Aristides, "reckon their race (γενεαλογοῦνται) from the LORD JESUS CHRIST: He is the SON of GOD most high." Although, in addressing Cæsar, the sacrament might not be alluded to particularly and by name, these faithful souls could not refrain from hinting, in such ways as were possible, at the glory of their regeneration. Indeed, Justin Martyr speaks unreservedly of the inward grace; fearing, as he says, to be thought insincere (πονηρεῖν τι ἐν τῇ ἐξηγήσει), if he omitted this.²

Perseverance, then, was counted upon, after baptism.³ "When we descend into the water," says Hermas, (about A.D.

¹ S. Basil (*De Spir. Sancto*, xv. 36).

² *Apology of Aristides*, xv., Justin Martyr, *Apol.* i. 61.

³ Passages like the following tend to show how the earlier writers fixed their attention on the baptismal cleansing, and with what difficulty they made room for any subsequent forgiveness. The first quoted is not generally reckoned a rigorist:—

Hermas (*Mandat.* iv. 3):—"Etiam nunc, domine, audiui a quibusdam doctoribus, quod alia pœnitentia non est nisi illa, cum in aquam descendimus, et accipimus remissionem peccatorum nostrorum, ulterius non peccare, sed in castitate permanere. . . . Si quis post vocationem illam magnam et sanctam tentatus fuerit a diabolo, et peccaverit, unam pœnitentiam habet. Si autem subinde peccat, et pœnitentiam agat, non proderit homini talia agenti: difficile enim vivit Deo."

Clem. Alex. (*Strom.* ii. 13):—"τὸν οὖν εἰληφῶτα τὴν ἀφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν οὐκ ἔτι ἁμαρτάνειν χρή. ἐπὶ γὰρ τῇ πρώτῃ καὶ μόνῃ μετανοίᾳ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν (αὕτη ἂν εἴη τῶν προηπαρξάντων κατὰ τὸν ἐθνικὸν καὶ πρῶτον βίον τὸν ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ λέγω) αὐτίκα τοῖς κληθεῖσι πρόκειται μετάνοια ἡ καθαίρουσα τὸν τόπον τῆς ψυχῆς τῶν πλημμελημάτων . . . ἔδωκεν οὖν [ὁ Κύριος] ἄλλην ἐπὶ τοῖς κἀν τῇ πίστει περιπίπτουσί τινι πλημμελήματι, πολυέλεος ὢν, μετάνοιαν δευτέραν . . . μίαν ἔτι μετάνοιαν ἀμετανόητον . . . δόκησις μετανόιας, οὐ μετάνοια, τὸ πολλάκις αἰτεῖσθαι συγγνώμην ἐφ' οἷς πλημμελοῦμεν πολλάκις. [I owe

140,) "we receive remission of sins, that we may not sin any more, but continue in purity." And his hearer is apparently satisfied, for he says, "Master, I revived (*revixi*) when I heard this; for now I know I shall be safe, if I add not fresh sins to the former."¹ Tertullian, Clement, and Origen, are all much to the same effect. "We are not therefore washed, that we should cease to offend, but because we *have* already ceased." [That is, we ought to have utterly renounced our sins before we were christened.] The modern world thinks so little now of baptism, that one must emphasise to the utmost this high regard in which it was held by the ancient Church. Even if we pass on to a western writer so late as Laurence of Novara, we find that his one fear for neophytes is lest they should forget their cleansing from old sins. "The fountain never fails: since baptism thou hast knowledge to learn good and evil, as judge and arbiter to thyself." What he is sure of is, that they should never lose faith in the permanence of the grace of their regeneration.² We should give great attention to this sort of language, which helps us to understand the severe censures passed upon the lapsed.

For, of course, disappointment inevitably had its turn. The enemy was still prowling round the fold; and Christians of the second or third century stood in the same need of being warned against his temptations, as those at Corinth to whom S. Paul had addressed himself. Even with warning given, the baptised did not keep their watch unblamed. We must not indeed refuse to an age of martyrs that peculiar glory which belongs to the noble *candidatus exercitus*.³ Men who would sooner die than deny their Christian profession must have kept themselves

this quotation to Dr. Swete's "Review of Penit. Discipline," in the *Journal Th. Studies*, April, 1903.]

Origen, (Hom. ii. in *Levit. iv.*) seems more than half inclined to agree with those who teach that "Apud nos una tantummodo venia est peccatorum, quæ per lavacri gratiam in initiis datur. Nulla post hæc peccanti misericordia conceditur," etc. But he presently reflects that this would cause despair.

¹ Hermas (*Mandat. iv. 3*).

² S. Laur. Mellif. (Hom. i. *De Pœnit.*)

³ For the extraordinary reverence felt by the Fathers for martyrs, see e.g. S. Basil (Hom. *In xl. Martyres*) or S. Greg. Naz. (*Orat. iv. 69*).

to a wonderful extent "unspotted from the world." Yet many of the crimes familiar to "Gentiles who know not GOD" would be seen also among those "before whose eyes JESUS CHRIST had been openly set forth crucified." Fierce outbursts of passion would be followed by shedding of blood; sacrilegious communions would be made from time to time by those of impure life. And, in contrast to the splendid heroism of the martyrs, cowards would run to the heathen temples to save their lives by an act of apostasy.

Due provision was made for these things in course of years. Popes like Calixtus and Cornelius, or later, Siricius and Celestine, decreed what was to be done in various specified cases, and the lapsed ceased to cause insuperable hindrance to the Church's action. Those who had courage underwent the discipline prescribed, and at its termination were reconciled. Yet it would seem that the difficulty *was*, for some time, thought insuperable. And one can well imagine the extreme indignation, wonder, and perplexity with which the faithful remnant would regard such "despite done to the Spirit of grace." What were these unhappy creatures in their madness doing? Inviting Babylon to exult over Sion, and the "world-rulers of this darkness" over the children of light! Nay, were they not "treading under foot the SON of GOD?" How they had disappointed the strong expectation that grace received at the Font would never fail, that the new life by water and the HOLY GHOST would be an abiding citizenship in heaven! We cannot be surprised at the unwillingness to restore these lapsed Christians. How was it possible that they could be forgiven? They had chosen to go back to paganism with all its abominations, and could have no right to privileges which they had despised and forfeited. Had not the LORD Himself declared, that they who deny Him in the presence of men shall be denied before the angels of GOD? Nay, of all the greater transgressions was it not written, that they who do them "shall not inherit the kingdom of GOD?"

So the controversy raged for many years, the rigorists not being easily convinced or silenced. We find different counsels prevailing in different Churches: Asia was passionate,

turbulent, unrelenting, while Rome and Alexandria were more inclined to mildness and mercy. At Carthage, the violence of Tertullian as a Montanist was soon succeeded by the wiser gentleness of S. Cyprian. This great martyr-bishop, though he honoured Tertullian as his "master," refused to follow him in his pleading for absolute and irreversible exclusion.¹ Tertullian would reserve the pardon of lapsed Christians to GOD only; but S. Cyprian brought them within the reach of the Church's penitence. He said that it made all the difference whether their deadly offence had been given freely and wilfully, or under strong pressure with threatening. He insisted on a merciful consideration for those who, although they had sacrificed to an idol, had only consented after enduring extremity of torture.² His letter to Antonianus is a model of considerate kindness coupled with firmness: even when the excuse of torture was not alleged, he was all for letting the lapsed retrieve their character if they would.³ Thus, if the storm of persecution still raged around, he would shorten their punishment, so as to enable them to meet death bravely next time, and with the full hope of Christians. Or, if a quiet interval had succeeded, he would still promise them Communion before they died, with or without the public reconciliation. In all which he showed his remarkable prudence and largeness of heart. He was not afraid of a righteous strictness; and many in Carthage blamed him for being too severe. But he was also constantly reviled by an

¹ As a Catholic, Tertullian had said that the lapsed might be restored, if the whole Church laboured together to bring them back, by a common repentance and fervent intercession. As a Montanist, he closed the door entirely, so far as the Church's action was concerned; quoting Heb. vi. 4-8, and 1 S. John v. 16, and arguing that the Prodigal Son affords no encouragement except to *heathens* repenting. It does not follow that he condemned the lapsed, or adulterers, to final reprobation: "sed de venia Deo reservamus."

² S. Cypr. *Ep.* liii. (lvi.):—"Puto his indulgentiam Domini non futuram quos constat . . . passos esse carcerem, diu ac longa iteratione cruciantibus repugnasse: ut quod, in novissimo, infirmitatis carnis subactum videtur, meritorum præcedentium defensione relevatur." The same leniency is to be observed in another martyr-saint, S. Peter of Alexandria, who says, of some who had given way after torture, τὰ στήγματα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐνδείκνυνται ἐν τοῖς σώμασιν αὐτῶν. (S. Petri. Alex. Canon i. A.D. 306.)

³ S. Cypr. *Ep.* lii. (lv.).

opposite party for what was termed his laxness; and these would have refused altogether what even he only dared to concede *in extremis*.¹ That they should be admitted to penitence at all, was more than they had a right to expect: perhaps, by an utmost stretch of charity, they might be included; but then they must seek earnestly, with much chastisement of self, and many tears.² Nor must they suppose that the same road could be trodden again if they relapsed. This was the "second plank for the drowning, after shipwreck;"³ the very last resource that could be thought of. It is surprising to find one so tender-hearted as S. Ambrose, at his own later date, still holding fast to the *semel*, though no longer requiring discipline in all its horrors.⁴

III. Now, if the limits were so short to the mercy which was canonical, one can see that some change would be imperative, either in relaxing the public exomologesis, or providing a substitute for it. Thus we feel that there would be a growing inclination towards private confession, apart from that increased attention to secret sins which was noticed in Chap. v. Had the public penitents continued to be only those guilty of homicide, adultery, or heresy (which would take the place of apostasy when persecution from the heathen government had ceased),⁵ it would still be found less and less possible to drive all into the ranks of the *substrati*, having so little hope as they had of

¹ Nor does S. Cyprian concede it, even then, to those who had delayed repentance till death was imminent. ("Prohibendos omnino censuimus a spe communionis et pacis," *Ep.* lii. 19.) On this subject, consult Canon Bright's *Notes on Canon xiii. of Nicaea*. At last, Pope Celestine I. (A.D. 422-432) ruled that *all* who earnestly desired should be received to penitence. (Martene, *De. Ant. Rit.* lib. i. 2, art. 2.)

² See Origen, (*Hom.* ii. in *Levit. iv.*):—"via dura et laboriosa . . . fiunt ei lacrymæ suæ panes die ac nocte . . . si carnem tuam maceraveris," etc.

³ Commonly quoted from S. Jerome, (*Ad Demetriadem*, *Ep.* cxxxi. 9,) but really found, much earlier, in Tertullian (*De Pœnitentia*, cap. iv.).

⁴ See S. Ambros. (*De Pan.* lib. ii. cap. x.):—"Merito reprehenduntur qui sæpius agendam pœnitentiam putant, quia luxuriantur in Christo . . . Sicut unum baptisma, ita una pœnitentia."

⁵ Heresy was taken to be almost as black a crime as apostasy. Theodoret hates the Arians as heartily as he does Julian the Apostate. And he says, "When the devil could no longer set up the worship of the creature [by idolatry], he tried to bring down the Creator to a level with the creature [by heresy]." (See *Theod. Hist.* bk. i. chap. ii.)

speedy recovery.¹ What, indeed, exactly was done, and where and when it began, we lack information to decide. All good men recognised the Divine prerogative of pardon as superseding ecclesiastical, or any human regulations. From the Divine forgiveness, not the worst offenders were excluded, if they came, like David, with that broken and contrite heart which GOD will not despise.² As to whether the Church, their mother, also made provision for them, opinions differ; or rather, they differ as to *what* the provision was; for it could not be, in those days, that souls were left each to its own unaided efforts. But some historians—not all—maintain that sinners who gave proof of genuine sorrow were absolved in private; without waiting for that public restoration of privileges which they had perhaps forfeited beyond recall; or might not expect till death was close at hand.³ Martene is quite certain that, until the pontificate of Nicolas I. (A.D. 858-867), there was no readmission to Communion till after the completion of whatever penance had been enjoined: so that, if private absolution was really granted earlier, this must have been kept secret for a considerable time; unless—which is quite possible—penitents, though known to have been absolved, went on still unhouselled (*χωρὶς προσφορᾶς*), as they might without incurring public disgrace.⁴ However, Morinus and others think⁵ that the *forum internum* did at any

¹ Besides the above-mentioned, one inducement to reform may have been the dread of insincere confessions or retractations made in public. Even so early as the second century, see what is told of the heretic Cerdon by S. Irenæus (iii. 4).

² Compare S. Jerome (*Ep.* cxlvii. 3): "Nihil ita repugnat Deo, quam cor impœnitens, Solum crimen est, quod veniam consequi non potest." And S. Augustine (Serm. lxxi. 7): "Pœnitentiæ quorumque criminum locus in Ecclesia non negatur . . . Ipsa impœnitentia est Spiritûs blasphemia, quæ non remittetur," etc.

³ Canon xiii. of Nicæa makes no promise except to the dying. For the more liberal view adopted afterwards, see S. Thomas Aqu. (P. iii. : Q. lxxxiv. Art. 10).

⁴ If we consult the most ancient authorities, Hermas defers pardon till the time when the penitent "perpassus fuerit omnia quæ illi instituta fuerint." Tertullian probably means the same when he says, "Confessione pœnitentia nascitur." Confession is only the beginning; then penitence must be rendered; and at the last, follows absolution. (See Hermas, *Simil.* vii.; Tertullian, *De Pœnit.* ix.)

⁵ On the doctrine of Morinus and the Jesuits, see, however, a note, p. 84.

rate always exist by the side of the other; and if the priest's part was to absolve, not from censures, but from the actual guilt of sin, one is strongly persuaded to believe that he would not defer this boon for a single moment after true contrition had been manifested. If we might translate Sozomen's ἀπέλυε by "he absolved them" (in the passage quoted in Chap. v.), we should have clear proof that so it was. Unfortunately, ἀπέλυε is more likely to be the equivalent of *dimisit*, than of *remisit*. Canon Bright's learned note on the 11th Canon of Nicæa, while full of information on the grades of penitents, throws no light on the question of private absolution.¹

IV. However, we should be wandering a little from our proper course, if we spent time in labouring to prove the institution of a private reconciliation of sinners in the early Church. What we had to do in this chapter was to show that, whether dealt with privately or by the public discipline, deadly sins were always classed apart from venial, and always, if pardonable, subjected to absolution. Perhaps it might have been supposed that the strong view taken of these grave offences would have been peculiar to seasons of exceptional trial and difficulty, as when persecution was raging. Now, we have seen what disappointment and horror were felt when the grace of regeneration failed to keep baptised persons from lapsing into idolatry. So long as Christian apologists could hold up their heads and declare that "Christians lead good lives, and, though they are punished as malefactors, they who hate them can give no reason for their hatred,"² there was always hope that the

¹ What the ordinary course was, is stated very clearly in the 30th Canon of the Council of Hippo:—"The time of penance shall be appointed by the bishop, in proportion to the greatness of the sin. Priests may not absolve any penitents without the consent of the bishop unless the bishop is absent, and it is a case of necessity. If an offence is publicly known, the penitent shall receive the imposition of hands before the apsis." This last sentence seems to imply that the absolution might be in private, if the offence had *not* been "publicly known." (See Hefele, E.T. vol. ii. p. 399.) But this Canon is not earlier than A.D. 393.

² For a defence of Christian morality, see the *Epistle to Diognetus* (chap. v. ad fin.). On the other hand, the corruption prevalent in most heathen households is admitted not only by satirists, but by a sober writer like Quintilian, who deprecates a home education for young children on this account. (See *De Instit. Orat.* lib. i. cap. 2.)

Church would hold her ground. Fire and sword and torture would have no power to shake the firmness of a pure conscience, and a soul prepared by prayer.¹ Whereas, if the answer were taken from them through the unworthy conduct of false brethren, all seemed lost. We can therefore well understand how such severe punishment came to be meted out to the prime offenders. But it would be quite a mistake to think that there was any change of opinion about deadly sins, after the Church obtained peace under Constantine. The distinction laid down in 1 S. John v. was never forgotten. Pass on to S. Augustine, in whose time all organised persecution had long ceased. The list of sins has been much lengthened now; but the Church's judgment of them is the same. S. Augustine has still the same dividing line to draw between *peccata quotidiana sine quibus nemo esse potest*, and these other *mortifera*—the "sins unto death." These may or may not be brought under the canonical discipline; but there is a more awful consideration. Until repented of, deadly sins exclude the sinner from fellowship with the Saviour, and subject him to the terrible sentence of doom at the Last Day.² The separation which the Fathers contemplate is no mere exile of man's devising. The kingdom from which deadly sin shuts out a soul is GOD'S kingdom of grace, in which the baptised, as "heirs of GOD," are led by the HOLY SPIRIT. Then, these Fathers teach how the banished is restored. It is good that he should look homewards like the prodigal, and acknowledge that he has sinned against heaven, and before GOD. But that is only the beginning. He needs more, before he can indeed be delivered "out of all his fear." And there is only one way. He must seek the ministry of Absolution; he must be admitted by "the Church's keys."

V. Such is their teaching; and of course one perceives that, by adopting it and bringing it into use for ourselves, we shall be

¹ See Tertull. (*Apol.* cap. xxx.). The Christian martyrs inherited most truly that splendid dauntless courage of the older Jewish Church: (Daniel iii.; 2 Macc. vii.).

² See S. Aug. (Serm. cccli. 7): "*Qui separari a regno cœlorum timet per ultimam sententiam summi iudicis, per ecclesiasticam disciplinam a sacramento cœlestis panis interim separetur.*"

led into the thick of a battle. An absolving priest is, according to the common cry, a wretch who deserves little better than that bare existence which the clemency of Roman conquerors allowed to their captives in war. If he must live, let him be stripped of everything that could make him dangerous. A prospect of woe!

Now, we do not receive the Fathers' doctrine as infallible in every word; and the intention has been to rest one's case, not so much on tradition, as on careful comparison of teachings of Holy Scripture, with the aid of common sense and kindness.¹ Yet the Fathers help us to understand Scripture. None ever made more use of the Bible than they; and there is a wonderful consent among them in what they derive—on most subjects and particularly on penitence—from both Old Testament and New.²

Going, then, as they did, to the Bible for our proof, what shall we say are the consequences of sin, to the soul in which it is found? How comes the word "death" to be used in speaking of this? Perhaps we have felt something, ourselves, of the inward havoc that is produced by the insurrection of a created will against its Creator. Or we have traced it in the world around: we have noticed the subjection of noble natures to headstrong passion, which seemed to hold them bound whom GOD had made free. We have marked the unavailing struggles of immortal spirits against the sensual appetite, and longed for

¹ It should however be observed that some of that party, whose maxim until lately was "The Bible only," are in these last days become great upholders of tradition. One hears that "nothing may be done in the Church of England against the doctrine of the last three hundred and fifty years." The question then arises whether, even within those impassable limits, confession and absolution have not been known and practised?

² To a large extent, one may say that the Christian and Catholic doctrine of penitence is found in Origen's writings on Leviticus and Numbers, in S. Augustine's Enarrations on the Psalms, and in the copious Homilies on Genesis, Isaiah, S. Matthew, and S. John, some by the last-named Father, and some by S. Chrysostom; while in S. Ambrose's two famous books on Penitence, as also in the treatises of S. Cyprian, and the Catechetical Lectures of S. Cyril, the text is everywhere tessellated with quotations and illustrations from the Old and New Testaments. It is remarkable that the fondness of some Latin Fathers for allegorical interpretation never detracts from the justice and soberness of their conclusions in morals.

one to deliver them. Do the sacred writers bear us out in these instinctive yearnings? Do they speak of sin as an intolerable burden? a tyranny? an extinction of life?

The answer is that, at the beginning, man became "a living soul," through infusion of the breath of GOD—that is, of the HOLY SPIRIT—into his being, Adam is called the "son of GOD," and said to have been formed in "the image and likeness of GOD." It is, therefore, necessary to believe that, besides the animal and the rational, he enjoyed the blessedness of a spiritual life, in that part of his nature which GOD had designed to be immortal.

Next, the continuance of the HOLY SPIRIT'S indwelling was made to depend on Adam's obedience. That failing, "in the day that thou eatest" (of the forbidden tree), "thou shalt surely die." GOD'S word must stand. Adam ate, and the death which passed upon him was, in the spiritual realm, immediate. The "LORD and Giver of life" departed, as He had said. But the disobedience, through which such great destruction came to pass,¹ was sin: "sin is the transgression of the law." S. Paul is describing the same fall when he writes, "Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin."

CHRIST came to redeem all mankind; and souls are now again admitted into a covenant with Almighty GOD, through their "baptism into the death" of JESUS our Saviour. Through the mediation of JESUS CHRIST, the HOLY GHOST is given as at the first, that we may answer to the Divine will, and recover the true outlines of the Divine image. Yet again, as at the first, we may forfeit the sanctifying presence by disobedience. The sin reckoned "deadly" is, first, a *perverse choice*, when the creature takes part against the Creator;² and,

¹ Compare Milton, *Paradise Lost*, book ix. :—

"Earth felt the wound, and nature from her seat
Sighing through all her works, gave signs of woe,
That all was lost."

² For a forcible definition of sin, see Ecclus. x. 12, 13 :—"It is the beginning of pride when a man departeth from the LORD, and his heart is departed from Him that made him. . . . The beginning of pride is sin."

secondly, an *intelligent* choice, made with clear perception that he is transgressing a precept which is of Divine sanction and authority.¹ According to one school of teaching in the Church, any act of this kind strikes the soul dead as in a moment:² "the soul that sinneth, it shall die:" the prodigal son was "dead" when he turned his steps towards the far country: "she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." Perhaps, however, the extinction of the spiritual life through sin may not be quite so immediate as is sometimes represented.³ Could we, indeed, suppose such a thing without implying some reproach to the efficacy of baptism? For we are told that "all who have been baptised have put on CHRIST;" or, as the apostle words it elsewhere, they "have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, FATHER." Or again, in S. John's Gospel, "Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." It is true that the abundant riches of GOD bestowed on the baptised must increase their condemnation, if they wilfully turn away to paths of disobedience. But, surely, He who wrought so wonderful a change in our poor nature, and set such glorious hopes before us, will not suffer all to be undone, and as if it had never been, for the sake of one moment of miserable mad rebellion?"⁴ Certainly, there are texts which convey a different impression. The HOLY SPIRIT may be "resisted," or He may be "grieved," before His light within us is finally "quenched." There is sin "unto death," writes S. John: that is, sin which *tends* to death. And S. Paul,

¹ It is important to know both what is sin, and what is not. S. Chrysostom asserts very strongly that the natural infirmity of the flesh does not provoke GOD to wrath, as does wilful disobedience:—

ἡ ἐπιθυμία ἁμαρτία μὲν οὐκ ἔστιν. And again, εἰ λέγει ὅτι οὐκ οἰκεῖ ἐν αὐτῇ [τῇ σαρκί] ἀγαθόν, οὐπω τοῦτο ἐγκλημα τῆς σαρκός. (Hom. xii. in Rom.)

² So Cardinal Manning, *Sermons on Sin*, p. 40:—"The soul dies at once, and on the spot." So also the *Spiritual Exercises of Manresa*.

³ Thus S. Basil (*De Spir. Sancto*, xvi.), though he declares that at the Last Day there will be, for the ungodly, *διχοτομία*, i.e., everlasting separation from the HOLY SPIRIT, will not assert so much in this present time. νῦν μὲν γὰρ, εἰ καὶ μὴ ἀνακράται [τὸ πνεῦμα] τοῖς ἀναξίοις, ἀλλ' οὖν παρεῖναι δοκεῖ τοῖς ἅπασι ἐσφραγισμένοις, τὴν ἐκ τῆς ἐπιστροφῆς σωτηρίαν αὐτῶν ἀναμένον.

⁴ S. Francis de Sales (*Esprit*, p. 221), objected to pronounce anyone wicked for a single bad action: "Good habits are not destroyed by one act of a contrary nature."

"The *end* of those things is death." And S. James, "The sin" (conceived of lust), "when it is *full-grown*, bringeth forth death."¹ We sometimes hear that, whereas souls in a state of grace are bound to GOD by the virtues of faith, hope, and charity, the effect of these wilful sins is utterly to break the third and strongest bond (since to disobey GOD, who is Love, must be to hate Him), and so inevitably to lose the second also, which is hope;² leaving only faith, and leaving that to condemn us, as it does the devils. But this division is too sharp. In point of fact, few have such perfect understanding as to sin boldly against faith and knowledge. Now, wherever faith has been at all obscured, it cannot be a man's accuser to the full extent, and moreover, since there is less malice in the act of rebellion, even love may survive in some slight degree.³ "FATHER, forgive them, for they know not what they do." There must be a long hardening of the conscience, before the great offence is reached.⁴ And the unhappy wretch, whose—

"Conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale,
And every tale condemns him for a villain,"⁵

seldom exists but in the vivid imagination of a poet.

Therefore, although we so commonly speak of deadly or mortal sins, and the Fathers compare the sorrow that should be felt for one fallen to the mourning over a lifeless corpse,⁶ we will not push this metaphor to its utmost possible extent.

¹ S. Ambrose (*De Pæn.* i. cap. xi.), says that a lapsed person may be called "semi-vivus," like the wounded traveller in the parable. In him, still, "vitale aliquid fides spirat."

² The dependence of hope on charity is clearly marked in Rom. v. 5.

³ "He who loves is secure," is the teaching of S. Augustine. "Nemo illum movet de Ecclesia Catholica; et si foris illam [sc. caritatem] incipiat habere, intronititur, quomodo ramus olivæ a columba." (*Enarrat. in Ps. xxi.*)

⁴ Compare what is said in the admirable Treatise *De Interiori Domo*, cap. xii.: "Velle namque peccare, malum est, peccare pejus, in peccato perseverare pessimum est: nolle pœnitere, mortale."

⁵ Shakspere (*K. Rich. III.*, Act v. sc. 3).

⁶ This saying is attributed to S. Augustine, but without reference, by the author of the *Spiritual Exercises of Manresa*. S. Augustine, however, says (*In Joann. Tractat.* xlvii. 8), "Moritur anima amisso Deo, qui vita est ejus."

There may be a condition of soul like the body of Lazarus, long dead, and imprisoned in the tomb.¹ But those with whom we have to do may more probably resemble that traveller on the road to Jericho, who was not yet lost to existence, though bleeding from wounds which might soon have become fatal. For we are not under the Law, nor even the dispensation of Eden; but under CHRIST. And when "the kindness of GOD our Saviour, and His love towards men, appeared," His mercy saved us "by the washing of regeneration, and through renewing of the HOLY GHOST; which he poured upon us richly, through JESUS CHRIST our Saviour." That Almighty love is not quickly forfeited. "Even man's sin hardly rends the bond of love that united him to GOD."² Only the branch that is quite dry and barren He "taketh away."³

To hold fast to this hope is unquestionably right, whatever may happen.

Still, the ancients may not have been altogether wrong, either in their estimate of the guilt of what they called *crimina*, or in the remedy they employed by Absolution. What we, children of GOD by our baptismal membership, do in transgression of a known Divine law, may not kill the soul at once; but who can doubt that it draws upon it the heavy wrath of our "righteous FATHER?" If we "live by the Spirit," it can only be wicked and shameful that we do not "walk by the Spirit." But, while we grant this—perhaps some will say—how does the intervention of a priest avail to wipe off the reproach? That will be the subject of our next chapter, to be discussed there as fully as may be. One remark, however, seems suggested at once, by what has gone before. We have taken the more moderate view of deadly sin, and, therefore, our first thoughts about Absolution may be moderate also. For whereas, if each mortal sin were death to the full extent, we might expect to find awakened souls looking to the priest to

¹ See S. Aug. (Serm. ccclii. 8).

² From a Sermon by Canon T. T. Carter.

³ The *νεκρὸς ἐν* in Rev. iii. 1 can hardly be taken as exclusive of all spiritual life and energy; since the Sardian angel, who is "dead," is presently bidden to strengthen (*στηρίξαι*) others.

work a miracle by raising them from the dead; now, on the contrary, since we hesitate to believe this, we should be free to offer our ministry for the lesser boon of healing and consolation. That cannot be *all* that we ought to mean, unless by healing we understand a very great raising indeed; because this absolution (as will be seen in the next chapter), is the very virtue of the resurrection of the LORD JESUS, as wholly as when we were baptised. But still, there can be no harm in beginning, much as the Prayer Book does, with the removal of hindrances to distressed consciences.

"Godly sorrow," as we are told, "worketh repentance unto salvation, which bringeth no regret;" and any person who is humble and earnest may have this godly sorrow in the depth of his own heart, unobserved by human witnesses. Then, that honest contrition, which he keeps to himself, cries to the ears of GOD, and is heard and accepted of Him; and so pardon and peace are his, without oral confession or word of reconciliation from CHRIST'S minister. "Open your conscience before GOD," says S. Chrysostom: "pray with your memory, if not with your tongue: though you are silent, He knows all."¹ In every part of Catholic Christendom it is, and has ever been, admitted that a perfect sorrow suffices for the pardon of any, even the worst transgression, if petition be made with faith in the merits of our Divine Redeemer.²

Why, then, did the Fathers make that difference, and send all grievous offenders to the priest for absolution? Now this which follows is only part of the answer, the rest being reserved. But what we may say at the present moment is, that although a perfect sorrow is accepted by our all-merciful LORD, a perfect sorrow is not always in itself consoling. It does not entirely satisfy the hunger, nor quell the alarms, of

¹ In a later chapter there will be an attempt made to appreciate the penitential teaching of this great Father.

² See, for instance, the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, part II. chap. v. qu. 34. Also S. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa*, part III. suppl. qu. v. art. 1):—"Contrition, if perfected by charity, *sufficit ad plenam culpæ et pænæ deletionem.*" S. Francis de Sales instances one whose heart God touches within the next moment after sinning, so that an act of contrition brings him back to Him immediately.

repenting sinners. We cannot, indeed, discern the thoughts and intents of hearts, as He can who made them. But one thing at least is plain. Every man who is in earnest will desire to have assurance of his forgiveness, so as to be relieved from trusting only to private feelings and inward experiences. Not that any should presume quite to forget their past, as if it were sufficient reparation that they should endeavour to live respectably in time to come. That would be the modern optimism, which the writer has already ventured to denounce, and which—whatever may be said to the contrary—fails to bring any settled peace at the last. But there are many besides who would fain be reconciled, though they never allow themselves to forget. These know that they cannot rest till they have healed the breach, and made their pardon sure. To them, then—may we not believe?—is “the word of this salvation sent.” We may well call it salvation. It is the word spoken by one commissioned from CHRIST Himself, declaring with all authority, “Thy sins are forgiven thee : go in peace.”¹

POSTSCRIPT.—The sin against the HOLY GHOST, which “shall not be forgiven, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come,” is not properly reckoned among the deadly sins, because it does not consist in any particular instance of disobedience to God’s law, but is the spirit of universal rebellion cherished to the end. Though in S. Mark’s Gospel it is called blasphemy, this does not require that the blasphemy should be outspoken, nor would the guilt of a mere impious word be the gravest of all ; but the sin against the HOLY GHOST is really opposed to that final perseverance in righteousness, to which the crown is promised. As perseverance in charity is the bond of all virtues, so does this hold together all forms of wickedness in the grasp of an abiding resistance to the power of Divine grace. It refuses obstinately to “know that the

¹ One must regret the discouraging tone of Jeremy Taylor, when speaking of assurance of forgiveness offered to the contrite. He says, “Though it be certain in religion, that whoever repents shall be pardoned, yet it is a long time before any man hath repented worthily ; and it is as uncertain in what manner, and in what measure, and in what time, God will give us pardon. . . . God keeps the secrets of this mercy in His sanctuary, and draws not the curtain till the day of death or judgment.” (Vol. ix. p. 225.) For what is more worthy of this illustrious, but somewhat erratic, divine, see extracts in the appendix to the next chapter.

goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." While the day of grace lasts, this sin is not irremissible: yet remission is hardly obtained, because its actual malice consists in rejection of forgiveness. "Impenitence is *itself* that blasphemy of the Spirit, which will not be forgiven." So concludes S. Augustine, after very careful discussion of the statements in S. Matthew and S. Mark.¹

Thus it is useless to speak of the sin against the HOLY GHOST in relation to penitence. "Non solum cum agitur pœnitentia, verum etiam ut agatur, Dei misericordia necessaria est . . . Qui vero in Ecclesia remitti peccata non credens, contemnit tantam divini muneris largitatem, et in hac obstinatione mentis diem claudit extremum, reus est illo irremissibili peccato in Spiritum sanctum, in quo Christus peccata dimittit."²

The vigilance of a Christian should be directed against all temptations to spiritual pride, that being the precursor of this awful hardness and blindness. But as to that, our LORD taught us once for all, in His temptation on the pinnacle.

¹ S. Aug. (Serm. lxxi.). Cardinal Manning, indeed (*Sin, and its Consequences*, p. 35), takes this sin of blasphemy to be one among the other "sins unto death;" but it seems best to follow S. Augustine.

² S. Aug. (*Enchir.* cap. lxxxiii.). Compare Maldonatus on S. Matt. xii.

CHAPTER VII.

Binding and Loosing.

THE point we have now reached is this. From early times the custom has prevailed of reserving all graver sins for the ministry of Absolution; which, the Fathers tell us, could be exercised only by bishops or priests.¹ A common belief was that, as one Sacrament was necessary for the first quickening of souls in CHRIST, another was required for the restoration of those who had subsequently lost their baptismal life: who, having committed serious sins, heartily longed to repent of and forsake them. Both have in fact been called "Sacraments for the dead."² However, after comparison of texts, it did not seem right to insist that spiritual death is the certain, immediate, and inevitable consequence of each greater act of disobedience. As S. Thomas says, there are degrees of guilt, greater or less;³ and who can be sure when the worst has been reached?⁴ Still, the wickedness of deadly sins was enough to give rise to apprehensions that grace might be forfeited; and without grace no man can stand. It was therefore right and proper that those repenting should desire the fullest assurance of forgiveness that could

¹ E.g., SS. Cyprian, Pacian, Basil, Ambrose; the *Apostolical Constitutions*. (Cosin, of course, says the same; but goes for authority, rather strangely, to the Jesuit Maldonatus, not much before his own time. See Cosin's *Works*, vol. v. p. 47.)

² See a note to Newman's *Lectures on Justification*, p. 154: "Catholics hold that there are two Sacraments which reconcile the sinner to God, or *sacramenta mortuorum*; viz. Baptism and Penance."

³ *Summa Theol.* Part iii., qu. lxxxiv. art. 10.

⁴ Whether absolution must be reserved till the worst *has* been reached—in other words, whether it is *only* fit for the dead, and not for the dying—is a question which I have not argued; because I do not think that such a thing has ever been taught by good men, of any school whatever.

be granted: if such assurance came through Absolution, they would surely demand that the priest should do his part.

Then, one can see what will be the next thing to be proved. We must show what the nature of Absolution is, and whether it deserves that pains should be taken to procure it. If that can be established, we may then proceed to discuss the right conditions for its reception; but no one will care to take pains about a thing that is neither valued nor loved.

Absolution. We are not familiar with the opposite term, which would be ligation, or colligation, if such words were in existence.¹ Yet binding and loosing are always the two alternatives. What is not loosed, remains bound: what is not bound, cannot require to be loosed. Of what nature, then, is the bondage?

One may answer, first, that in ancient times bonds and imprisonment went together. To be bound was almost an inseparable accident of captivity. They "sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron." Of Joseph it is said, "His feet they hurt with fetters, he was laid in chains of iron." When "all the doors" of S. Paul's prison-house at Philippi "were opened," it is also mentioned that "every one's bands were loosed."

Next, we hear of captivity in a dungeon which is Satan's.² The devil is a prince, to whom sinners have given dominion over their souls and bodies. He rules them by craft, cruelty, and oppression. He entangles them in his snare: he holds them securely, confined as in a castle or palace, over which he presides, as a "strong man armed."³ Through Adam's yielding to Satan, "sin had entered into the world, and death by sin." One therefore was needed, who should "bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver all

¹ *Colligatio* is found sometimes.

² In the Jacobite rite for the Consecration of a Patriarch:—"Give him the power of Thy HOLY SPIRIT, that he may loose all the bonds of those whom the enemy has bound in sin." (From Denzinger, quoted by Canon W. R. Churton, *Defence of English Ordinal*, p. 59.)

³ Or, sometimes, sin itself is described as the master of slaves: see Rom. vi. 6; vii. 14. It may be observed that most of the false heathen religions (e.g., Brahmanism) have tried to consecrate cruelty and slavery. These, said John Smith, the Cambridge Platonist, are "the badge and livery of the devil's religion."

them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

I. That deliverer, looser, absolver, is JESUS CHRIST.¹ The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because . . . He hath sent Me to proclaim release to the captives." "To this end was the SON of GOD manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." "If I by the finger of GOD cast out devils, then is the kingdom of GOD come upon you. When the strong man fully armed guardeth his own court, his goods are in peace; but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him his whole armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils."²

From these passages, to which many more might be added, it is evident that grievous sins are regarded in the New Testament as a bondage under the cruel tyranny of Satan; and that the one deliverer of captive souls is "the Stronger than he;" that is, the GOD-Man, the Saviour of mankind. There is none other but He. Whatever charm has attached to legends of heroes triumphant over the most terrible impersonations of hideous wrong, from Alcides to the blameless Arthur, from the sharp spear of S. George to the invincible gentle purity of Margaret of Antioch—whatever the beauty and glory of any of these, all must go back to Him as their only source. Back to that strong right arm which "put on strength" for our redemption, to the eye which looked on earth's darkness and illumined it, the feet which sought for and brought in those that had lost their way; the heart which "knew His people's sorrows," when He "came down to deliver them."

And surely, this is what every Christian knows. If we now hope for a second Advent of our LORD, when He will finally put down and destroy what remains of the tyranny of evil, it is because we believe that already, by His incarnation, He has bestowed upon us a citizenship in that heavenly Jerusalem which "is above and is free," already, by our membership in His

¹ So S. Aug. (Serm. xxvi. 9): "Ipse solvit, qui ligatus non est; ipse a mortuis liberat, qui est in mortuis liber."

² In speaking of CHRIST's binding of the strong man, S. Irenæus (iii. 8) draws a fine contrast between our glorious LORD and "that apostate slave, the devil."

Church, He has taken us where "violence is no more heard," already He has advanced us to "the liberty of the glory of the children of GOD." Yet, to revive the familiar doctrine at this moment may not be altogether superfluous. For we are on our way to speak now of human ministries of loosing, in the Church to which we belong. Let us therefore first declare—even though nothing else might have seemed conceivable or possible—our unaltered faith, that the only true Absolver and deliverer of sinful souls is, and for ever will remain through all the ages, JESUS CHRIST.

II. Now, since our LORD is He who holds all in His own firm grasp, it must follow that whatever He looses not, if He finds it bound, continues in its bondage. Does He find all souls in that condition? In a sense, all men have been bound, for all have sinned. Yet that would be absolutely true only of the unregenerate. For after baptism it is *possible* that that might come to pass of which S. John writes:—"He that was begotten of GOD keepeth himself, and the evil one toucheth him not." Our LORD's loosing would not be required for those who still "continued in His love," though committing daily faults of infirmity. Once more, then; our whole concern is, now, with the more grievous sins.

We have our LORD'S own word for it, that "every one that committeth sin is the bond-servant of sin."¹ When a man's will is so weak that he yields to a particular temptation whenever it presents itself, one can see directly that he only deserves to be called a slave. Whatever passion may have gained the mastery, it is evident that he cannot face the future unless CHRIST, the SON of GOD, shall "make him free indeed." But it has been thought too, and very generally, that he is bound by the memory, and the guilt, of sins already committed. These may not be very recent; he may even have turned away from them in heartfelt disgust: yet the recollection deprives him of all freedom of action in the ways of GOD.² He may desire earnestly to amend his life, yet sorrow and despair overwhelm

¹ Whosoever he be, and, as S. Chrysostom says, *καὶν μύριους ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς ἔχη στεφάνους*.

² Compare Prov. xxi. 8: "The way of him that is laden with guilt is exceeding crooked: but as for the pure, his work is straight" (marg.).

him, and he feels that his own resources are utterly inadequate, and what is done cannot be undone.¹ Surely, this is confirmed by experience. How many of us must have felt that, before we could attempt to serve GOD worthily, the first requisite was to break with the past! Who will strike off these chains that hold us down?

The answer is, of course, Look to CHRIST. When CHRIST comes near, the evil spirit cries out and would tear its victim, but it knows full well that it must relax its hold, so soon as He commands. "Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? I thank GOD through JESUS CHRIST our LORD." It would take too long, if one tried to show how fully and completely CHRIST'S absolving work was set forth in allegory, by the miracles that He wrought. Nor must we rest our doctrine of Absolution upon those special occasions when He laid His hand in healing upon poor afflicted bodies which "Satan had bound." Even the raising of Lazarus, to which the Fathers delighted to discover spiritual affinities, can hardly be used for purposes of argument in these literal days. There is, however, one miracle which is exceptional. The healing of the paralytic is strictly to our point, because, there, the sufferer's soul receives benefit as well as his body. "Whether is easier, to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins are forgiven, or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed and walk?" In this case, I think, no serious objection can be made to the inference that, but by bringing these two healings together, our LORD intended that one should illustrate the other; so that when He looses any by Absolution, He may be understood to rid the soul of a helplessness comparable to palsy. Thus He enables us to "rise and walk" with the strongest, healing us to a perfect soundness, restoring us to our appointed place in the ranks of His warriors.²

¹ So S. Augustine (Serm. xcvi. 6): "Revixerunt, quibus displicet quod fuerunt; sed ambulare non possunt. Hæc sunt vincula ipsius reatus." Compare Shakspeare (*Cymbeline*, Act v., sc. 4):—

"LEONATUS: My conscience! thou art fetter'd
More than my shanks or wrists: you good gods, give me
The penitent instrument, to pick that bolt,
Then, free for ever!"

² Compare the similar miracle wrought by S. Peter in Acts iii.; and

Again, CHRIST both looses and binds. While some stand before Him in the liberty that He confers, others prefer their chains to all His "kindness." He binds, then, those who refuse His loosing, who will not turn to Him by repentance and faith. On the hypocrites, especially, who act a lie, and speak peace to their consciences when there is no peace, He has an adverse judgment to pronounce—"Your sin remaineth." Their state of bondage is of their own choosing, and He will not save them against their will.¹

So much concerning our Divine Master's own judicial discretion: His entire restoration of the penitent, His rejection of the deceitful.

III. Let us proceed next to the passages, so exceedingly well-known, in S. Matthew's Gospel, which to some of us are conclusive for *ministerial* Absolution. One might indeed have presumed that the power would be continued by delegation, if we had only the paralytic's healing to go upon. For the multitude took that miracle for an indication of GOD'S will to bestow upon *men* the authority to forgive sins: and our LORD Himself had suggested the lesson, when He declared that He was making proof of a right which belonged to Him as "Son of Man," dwelling among men "on earth." The natural expectation would be, that a human ministry of reconciliation would be continued after He left the earth.² The whole glory and efficiency of such a ministry would be His: but the evidence to the senses, by words spoken and hands outstretched, would be supplied by the men whom He should send, after His ascension into heaven. However, there is not much occasion to work this out, when we are able to turn to such a luminous pronouncement as that made to S. Peter, in the sixteenth chapter of S. Matthew. "I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the

that apostle's words (Acts iii. 12-17) so applicable to the minister's part in Absolution. For the spiritual "walk," see Gal. v. 16-26.

¹ Compare Rom. i. 28, "GOD gave them up to a reprobate mind:" and Ex. x. 20, "The LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart."

² So S. Ambrose (*In S. Luc. v. 23*): "Quis enim potest peccata dimittere nisi solus Deus, qui per eos quoque dimittit, quibus dimittendi tribuit potestatem?"

gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Be it remembered, that this follows upon S. Peter's great confession of CHRIST as "the SON of the living GOD." Because of the strength of his faith in the Incarnation, this great apostle receives a commission from his Master both to found the one Church of the redeemed, and to keep the approaches to its gates. Nothing can be plainer than this. CHRIST is the one Head over all: the Church is His, the gates are His, the whole power to admit souls or to repel them is His alone.¹ He is LORD of life and death, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. S. Peter is chosen a builder and keeper under Him, to bind or to loose in His Name, for the one reason that his faith has preceded all the rest in recognising the Divine Majesty of this meek and lowly JESUS. Later (see S. Matt. xviii.), the other apostles will share these prerogatives—or at least the binding and loosing—with S. Peter; after them, and from them, the clergy, in a long succession. But the source of all is the act of faith at Cæsarea Philippi: "Thou art the CHRIST, the SON of the living GOD."

With regard to the keys, there is a sense in which they may have been intrusted as an instrument of office, singular and peculiar, to this chief apostle. To CHRIST Himself they belong as sovereign LORD and Master; or (as we read in the Hebrews), "as a son over His own House:" He is seen with the keys in several well-known passages in the Apocalypse. If He promises them to S. Peter, one would think that this must mark some special pre-eminence granted to S. Peter alone. For the metaphor is almost certainly derived from Isaiah xxii., where the functionary is a steward,² having great dignity, and full

¹ If any human being partakes of this authority, he does so only by a right of delegation from CHRIST. Otherwise, man's part is to knock: God opens. (S. Matt. vii. 7.)

² Rather than a prince; although Maldonatus says, "Per claves in Scriptura principatus significatur."

control over the gate of entrance to the king's palace.¹ We should spoil the metaphor if we supposed more than one steward; and, besides, the bestowal of the keys in S. Matt. xvi. is actually and precisely to Simon Peter; so that when, in the eighteenth chapter, the power of Absolution is extended to the rest of the twelve, this particular stewardship is not included in the extension. There may still be uncertainty as to what exactly the prerogative was, and no sufficient proof that any of it was handed down to S. Peter's successors in the primacy.² But Protestants and Ultramontanes alike take the keys to have

¹ See Delitzsch on Isaiah xxii. 22: "The power of the keys consisted not only in supervision of the royal chambers, but in deciding who was, and who was not, to be received into the king's service."

² In order to justify the Ultramontane position, we must believe (1) that CHRIST made S. Peter both the rock *from* which He would begin to build, and that *upon* which the Church should rest to the end of time (as S. Leo says, *In Petri sede Ecclesia Petrum suscipit*): (2) that CHRIST promised to give to S. Peter a master-key of dominion over the House of God, to be transmitted by inheritance to all his successors in the See of Rome. The whole fallacy is in this second assertion. The first is probably true. For a house cannot change its foundation; and it is matter of history that the Church of Rome has ever paid honour to a Divine CHRIST as did S. Peter. (See what Liddon says of the *fides Romana*, in his Commentary on Rom. i. 8.) We may, therefore, naturally suppose that the Church still stands on the same rock as at first. This is the more remarkable, when one remembers the worthlessness or worldly ambition of so many Popes, in spite of which the deposit was safely kept. S. Cyprian, however (*De Unit. Eccles.* 3), speaks rather as if S. Peter had only to begin building:—"Ut unitatem manifestaret [Dominus], unitatis ejusdem originem ab uno incipientem sua auctoritate disposuit." So also S. Pacian (*Ep.* iii. 26), "He spoke to one, that from one he might lay the foundation of unity."

But for the second assertion there is very little to be said. S. Peter had the primacy; but neither he, nor his successors, were to be despots over the Church. His confession of CHRIST, glorious though it was, could be no cause for exalting him so high above his brethren who followed him in the same faith; and nothing of the kind was conceded by the rest of the twelve, or by S. Paul. Least of all did he claim supremacy for himself (1 S. Pet. i. 1; v. 1); he knew that CHRIST had made him a steward, "not master and lord." Papal despotism may have been a powerful support to the weak places of the feudal system; but no such supremacy was imagined by the most eminent of the early Fathers. It is true that S. Chrysostom (*Hom. in Matt. liv.*), goes so far as to say that our LORD "committed to a mortal man authority over all things in heaven, when He gave him the keys." But S. Chrysostom's attitude towards the Pope of his own day, S. Innocent I., was full of reverent love indeed, yet not of subjection.

been, in some respects, S. Peter's only, while he lived and presided in CHRIST'S Name.¹ Some judicial power there must have been, peculiar to himself; and not merely his as the *representative* apostle, according to that familiar thought, "In uno Petro figurabatur unitas omnium pastorum." (S. Aug. Serm. cxlvii.)

Yet this distinction is of no great consequence when we are defining the Church's laws of penitence. For, whatever we may think about an exclusive privilege granted to S. Peter, we always, in the usual way of speaking, couple the power of the keys with that of binding and loosing, and consider both to belong to all bishops and priests alike.² What the Fathers speak of are not *claves Petri*, but *claves Ecclesiæ*.³ This can be explained quite easily. Indeed, when one thinks of the practical question, it is hardly possible to separate the first power from the second. For surely it could not be meant that, when one of CHRIST'S ministers, though the humblest, had loosed a sinner from the bondage of his sin, he should find the fold barred against the sheep that he was bringing home. One and the same official, under CHRIST, must both deliver from the prison-house, and admit to the Kingdom of Heaven. So, more and more, these two metaphors have been understood as equivalent. To loose and to open are merely two ways of expressing what every priest is empowered to do, when he receives penitent souls to forgiveness in his Master's Name.

It would, therefore, be useless to carry farther a discussion on the special pre-eminence which may have belonged, by right, to "that faithful and wise steward, whom his LORD set over His household." Whatever that was, it did not take away from what S. Cyprian calls the *par potestas* of the other apostles. Nor did it at all preclude the regular opening of heaven's gate by the succession of Christian ministers since

¹ For an instance of the former, see Dr. Chase's article, "Simon Peter," in *Hastings' Dictionary*.

² S. Hilary (*De Trin.* vi. 33), appeals to all the apostles, "O sancti et beati viri, et ob fidei vestræ meritum claves regni cœlorum sortiti!"

³ So S. Aug. (Serm. cccli. 9): "Confugere ad ipsas claves Ecclesiæ, quibus solvatur in terra, ut sit solutus in cœlo."

their time. And, however we regard it, *that* is, and must be, the chief importance of the power of the keys. The unlocking, which is regular, takes precedence of what is extraordinary: the King's officer bestowing favours on great occasions¹ is not so essential as the daily minister of the eternal Priesthood of JESUS CHRIST.²

I cannot see that much stress ought to be laid on the keys being plural. Poets are agreed that that which opens heaven must be of gold; but whereas Milton makes the other an iron key, which "shuts amain,"³ Dante says that it is of silver, and that it represents the discernment requisite in a priest (or, in purgatory, an angel), who has to receive penitents.⁴ As if with this he first of all opened the heart and conscience of the sinner. S. Thomas inclines to the same view,⁵ which has been commonly adopted among Roman Catholics; but it is obviously fanciful, and best suited to the imagination of a sacred poet. If there are two keys, one would think that they should be used for different doors; but then the first should be the gate of sin's prison-house, which must always be opened before the other, so as to release the captive soul.⁶

However, discernment is most certainly needed for the ministry of Absolution; and so our LORD teaches, in the other famous passage on the subject, to which we now proceed.

IV. There is a large *consensus*⁷ in favour of assuming an

¹ I refer, of course, to the custom of reserving cases for the Pope's superior authority to determine, which is, surely, right in principle, if the power be used with moderation.

² See S. Aug. (Serm. cxlix. 7): "In Ecclesia claves, ubi peccata quotidie dimittuntur."

³ See Milton's *Lycidas*.

⁴ Dante (*Purgatorio*, ix. 118), "L'una era d'oro, el'altra era d'argento—
Quandunque l'una d'este chiavi falla,
Che non si volga dritta per la toppa,
Diss' egli a noi, non s'apre questa calla."

⁵ S. Thomas (*Suppl.* qu. xvii. art. 3).

⁶ Freaks of fancy are very many on this topic. Jewel (vol. iv. p. 516) makes the keys "instruction and correction by the Scriptures." He refers to 2 Tim. iii. 16, and quotes various Fathers on his side; but, really, confuses the absolving keys with the "key of knowledge," spoken of by our LORD in S. Luke xi. 52.

⁷ Though it may be that some distinguish between the two, as does a writer quoted in Poole's *Synopsis*; according to whom, S. Matthew's

identity of intention between S. John xx. 23 and S. Matt. xvi. 19. To "remit" or "retain" in S. John corresponds exactly with the "loosing" or "binding" in S. Matthew. But whereas our LORD had spoken of the power prospectively at Cæsarea Philippi, He declared it with more explicit sanction after He rose again, because the time had now come for its exercise; and this is what S. John has particularly to record. Now, for the first time, JESUS said—what had only been implied before—that *sins* were what His ministers had to loose, remit, and take away. Now, also, by using the expression, "Whose soever (*ἅν τινων*) sins ye remit," He plainly required His ministers to use their judgment upon the cases brought before them. They were not to "lay hands suddenly" in absolving, any more than in ordaining. They must discern between the honest and good heart, and the false and evil. Finally—in this, however, confirming what He had said before—He assures them that their sentence, whether of loosing or binding, will be ratified in heaven; by Himself, that is, the true and everlasting Priest.

[The force of the moods and tenses is only in part rendered by our translation, "ye remit," "they are remitted." Does not *ἅν τινων ἀφῆτε* imply that absolution should be—not exceptional indeed, yet rather occasional? "In case you should remit the sins of any." (If so, this would agree well with the principle of a less solemn penitence for mere daily faults.) But again, does not the perfect, *ἀφέωνται*, "they have been remitted," convey the idea of a ratification so immediate as to suggest Isaiah's "While they are yet speaking, I will hear?" These points are not too small to be noted. The ministerial intervention may be infrequent; but, directly the time comes for it, its power is recognised in the height of heaven.¹]

concern is "*circa articulos et decisiones legis*," while S. John's, only, is "*circa personas et peccata hominum*." It does seem not unlikely that the authority to govern, and to use ecclesiastical discipline, was included in that first promise, made to S. Peter as chief pastor and founder of the Church. Indeed, the power of the keys could hardly mean less than that.

¹ So Bishop Andrewes, "There is no delay between, no holding in suspense: . . . He saith not, Hereafter they may be, but they are already remitted."

Now comes what is most important. Why was the commission to the apostles made thus present and definite at that particular moment? Why was the forgiveness of sins mentioned then, and not before?

The answer is, because CHRIST had died, and risen again; and now, therefore, the dispensation of grace was beginning.

Let us observe that the authority to remit or retain sins was given at our LORD'S first appearing, after His resurrection, to the disciples assembled together. "When it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were . . . JESUS came and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when He had said this, He showed unto them His hands and His side." Let us attempt a short comment, ere we proceed farther. This takes place on the evening of Easter Day, as near as could be to our LORD'S Cross and Passion, as well as to the opening of the Holy Sepulchre, still more recent. It is a transaction within the Church, by which only the baptized will be profited,¹ and so the doors are shut, excluding all but the faithful. CHRIST'S first word is of peace, because those present must first be assured that their own sins are forgiven;² and He makes assurance doubly sure by showing the scars of those wounds which had been "the chastisement of their peace." In this, too, there was convincing proof of the truth of His resurrection; intended, doubtless, for the comfort of others also, who were present, as S. Luke relates, together with the apostles. So concludes the first part of His message on that evening. What follows is told by S. John alone, and has reference to none except the twelve. "JESUS, therefore, said to them [the disciples] again, Peace be unto you: as the FATHER hath sent Me, even so send I you. And when He

¹ That the apostles had been previously baptized, is thought to be proved by our LORD'S words to S. Peter before the Last Supper, "He that has been washed [or bathed] needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit."

² There can be little difficulty in accepting the fact that our LORD both baptized and absolved His apostles before the institution of regular means of grace. So S. Thomas Aqu. (*Suppl.* qu. lxiv. art. 3): "Ad excellentiam Christi pertinet, quod ipse potuit effectum sacramentorum sine exteriori sacramento conferre."

had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the HOLY GHOST: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." As if His meaning had been, "Already you have received your own forgiveness, you have seen and believed: now again I give you My peace that you may be ministers thereof to others. Yours is a true ministry, even as Mine which the FATHER sent Me to exercise as Son of Man. Yet apart from Me you can do nothing. Therefore I, your LORD and Master, who am the Resurrection and the Life, breathe into your souls that life-giving Spirit who is of Me. Take the HOLY GHOST, and go forth in My Name to restore mankind, and to heal the wounds of sin."

V. But was it strictly correct to make a distinction just now, to the effect that only the baptized would profit by this authority given to the apostles? Some of the Fathers appear to refer our LORD'S words to those preparing for baptism also;¹ and when we read them in S. John's Gospel, there seems at first sight no reason why that should not have been part of their intention. "*Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.*" We should remember, however, that, although plenary forgiveness is conferred in baptism, for all sins both original and actual, that is not properly a ministerial remission. In the Donatist controversy it was ruled that baptisms are valid though administered by one in heresy or schism, inasmuch as the grace of regeneration proceeds directly from GOD. In the *Scala Paradisi*,² it is said that whereas "the LORD granted the office of baptizing to many, He reserved to Himself alone the power and authority to remit sins in baptism." And the author of that treatise quotes the Baptist's testimony to CHRIST, "The same is He that baptizeth with the HOLY SPIRIT."

We must remember, again, that while there is no

¹ See, for instance, S. Cyprian (*Ep.* lxxiii. 7). Also S. Cyril Alex. (*In Joann.* lib. xii. cap. i. :) who takes the breathing of CHRIST to represent regeneration, and compares Gen. ii. 7. Also S. Cyril of Jerusalem (*Introduct. Lecture*). Most of this last might have been supposed intended for persons preparing for absolution, but is really for catechumens.

² Published with vol. vi. of S. Augustine.

forgiveness without repentance, the repentance demanded of catechumens is of a much slighter sort than when men "have been once enlightened, and tasted of the heavenly gift." Therefore, although it does appear probable that, in the third century, catechumens would be taken through the penitential grades side by side with the lapsed, this can hardly have been consistent with the earliest apostolic ruling.¹ There might, of course, have been special reasons for prolonging the preparation, besides the question of a candidate's previous habits. In such an age of persecution as that, one would have to think of the future quite as much as the past; and to consider whether he had firmness enough to endure such severe trials of faith as were certain to occur. So still, in the mission-field, we are averse to baptize converts till they have been fully tested, and found ready and willing to count the cost. But that is a different kind of discernment. A missionary should keep his eye on the horizon from which danger threatens his convert. But he cannot expect that much of deep contrition should be felt on account of sins committed before knowledge of GOD'S will, or the grace of His HOLY SPIRIT. And so a Christian minister's concern with such repentance would be trifling, when compared with what our LORD seems to require in S. John xx. 23.

Certainly, also, our LORD, on this Easter night, made no mention of baptism, which He reserved till nearer His Ascension. On the whole, therefore, we can hardly doubt that He was contemplating the case of souls already initiated. He foresaw that many of these would fall from their first sanctifying grace; and that a special power of the HOLY GHOST would be needed for their restoration. Thus He breathed the Spirit of life upon His disciples; first, as we may suppose, to enlighten their minds, and to make their ministry effectual before the great GOD who delighteth in mercy, yet is also supremely just. And then, that, through their agency, the Blessed Comforter might give His aid also to repenting sinners; touching their hearts with sorrow, refreshing them, when contrite, with His peace.

¹ See Acts ii. 41; xvi. 33.

VI. But why was Absolution instituted *before* Baptism, if baptism is the beginning of the soul's life in CHRIST, while absolution is for those who fall afterwards into sin? I am not aware that that question has ever been answered in a way to remove all doubt as to what the reasons were. However, it is permissible to suppose that our LORD, when He gave us sacraments, would lift up our minds to those mysteries concerning Himself, which they set forth or enshrined.¹ If so, one can understand how their future administration might not observe the same order which He chose at the first institution. For instance, if in the Eucharist we, His redeemed, were to partake of "His Body, given for us," we are not surprised to find the time chosen to have been when the oblation of the body of the Paschal lamb was fulfilled in the sacrifice of CHRIST Himself, upon the Cross, for our redemption.² Again, the sacrament of Baptism was the chief instrument in founding the Church, and the Church was to be founded so soon as, by the Ascension of JESUS CHRIST, His intercession became availing to produce the Mission of the HOLY SPIRIT the Comforter. We should expect therefore to hear of the institution of baptism not long before these great mysteries were enacted. And, surely, in the same way, when the question was of a means of Grace by which hope should be restored to repenting sinners, there was a fitness in choosing the day on which He, who had so lately suffered for our salvation, was "opening the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers" by His Resurrection. Absolution hangs upon the resurrection of the LORD JESUS.

¹ On this subject see S. Leo (*Ep.* xvi. 3). As regards the time chosen for the institution of baptism, he says, "De quo eos [sc. apostolos] etiam ante passionem potuisset instruere, nisi proprie voluisset intelligi regenerationis gratiam ex sua resurrectione cœpisse." The principle here is the same as what I have proposed, though the application may differ slightly.

² See a quotation, made as from S. Cæsarius, by Wilberforce, (*Doctr. of Holy Eucharist*, chap. xi.): "It was necessary that He who was about to withdraw the Body, which He had assumed, from our sight, and to transfer it to heaven, should this day consecrate for us the Sacrament of His Body and Blood: that the same object which was once offered as the price of our ransom, might be continually worshipped in a mystery . . . that that Victim might live continually in memory, and be always present by grace."

It is not perhaps in itself, so truly as baptism, a raising up "from the *death* of sin to a life of righteousness."¹ At least we may think not, if we hesitate to affirm that impenitence actually involves (except in extreme cases) the destruction of a soul. For where death is not, resurrection can be neither necessary nor possible. The extreme cases cannot indeed be ignored. There are sins which, "when full-grown, bring forth death;" and, even then, the word spoken in CHRIST'S Name is efficacious. If we were to deny the Church's power to deal with these, we should fall back into the error of Tertullian, or the Novatianists. But, at least with most persons who need serious repentance, it is not that their life, of the Spirit, has become wholly extinct: only, their sins are mortal wounds, tending to a speedy death if they be not healed. Then, do souls in this condition require to be "raised again?" Surely they do. The difference is only of degree. We must still have access for them to "the powers of the world to come," if they are to revive; and in the ministry of absolution, in the Catholic Church, we find regular agencies provided for this purpose. The loosing of the penitent in absolution, from a bondage nigh unto death, is a real extension of the virtue of our LORD'S resurrection.

Some dispute this, because they think that our LORD'S Easter promise had a wider scope, and that the remission to be spoken in His Name could not have been conditioned by the use of a mere "minor sacrament."² Now, no one supposes that a sacrament is more than a narrow channel for the immense love of GOD: yet for us, being what we are, it is perhaps a necessary channel. The fault of some most spiritually-minded writers is, that they provide no meeting-point between that infinite mercy and the sinner who needs it. No one, for instance, who

¹ Bishop Chr. Wordsworth, however, in his note on S. John xx. 23, comes very near to the doctrine of a *sacramentum mortuorum*. "Our resurrection from the death of sin is called . . . the first resurrection, necessary as a safeguard against the second death."

² See Mr. T. W. Drury's *Confession and Absolution*, p. 88:—"Is it credible that CHRIST, on the day of His Resurrection, at the first solemn meeting with His disciples, and in such solemnly impressive words, instituted only a minor sacrament?"

has read Dr. Dale's *Lectures on the Ephesians*, can forget his noble words on the Divine forgiveness ; but when we have read him to the end, we still miss the meeting-point. The sacramental system may be a way for fools to travel ; and yet the only sure way wherein " the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err." Nor is it given to us to know whether our LORD, on rising again, was occupied with His own redeeming thought, simple and sublime, or whether the needs of His poor feeble creatures, divers and manifold, may not rather have engaged the attention of the mighty Conqueror. As to Penitence being a "minor sacrament," it is only such by comparison with the two great Sacraments of the Gospel. A means of grace by which souls recover their baptismal life cannot be regarded as an insignificant fruit of the Resurrection of JESUS CHRIST.

Liddon says, (on Rom. i. 17) that " man is actually and inwardly freed from the guilt of sin at the moment when that sanctifying grace, which is the HOLY GHOST Himself, streams into man's heart ; and each effort flows directly from the action of faith, directed upon GOD'S redeeming mercy in CHRIST."¹ We do not contravene this most precious doctrine if we add, that the sacraments of Baptism and Absolution provide *nearer objects* for faith to rest upon, provided always that those are apprehended as means for securing GOD'S pardon and the grace of justification.

VII. Some confusion has arisen from the various metaphors employed to illustrate the minister's part. S. Augustine draws a distinction which is well known, between CHRIST, who alone raises the dead, and His disciples, who do but loose the grave-clothes.² But S. Augustine's intention is not to exclude the more grievous sins from the regular action of the Church in her sacraments. His illustration is taken from Lazarus ; and the idea in his mind is, really, to show the necessity for doing the disciples' part as well as the Master's. And although loosing or liberating is the most *obvious* benefit that the Church bestows

¹ See Liddon's *Explanatory Analysis of S. Paul's Ep. to the Romans*, p. 17.

² See S. Aug. (Serm. xcvi. 6) :—Ille suscitavit mortuum : illi solverunt ligatum. See also his *Enarrat. in Psalm ci.*, Serm. ii. : Merito per Ecclesiam dari solutio peccatorum potest.

(because this has what answers to it outwardly, in the *visible* restoration of the offender), yet at the same time the Church dispenses quickening grace, and works an inward change within the soul. Nothing to disprove this can be quoted from S. Augustine, or from any of the Fathers. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which CHRIST alone raises the dead; because He alone "hath life in Himself;" and what the Church imparts is not her own life, but hers merely as derived from Him. CHRIST alone is "the Resurrection and the Life," in whom "he that was dead" may yet "live." Thus, elsewhere, S. Augustine calls attention to the peculiar dignity of that Divine act, from which the Church takes her authority, when He "breathed on them and said, Receive ye the HOLY GHOST." *Quantus Deus est qui dat Deum! Neque enim aliquis discipulorum Ejus dedit Spiritum Sanctum.*¹

VIII. The nature of Absolution has now been set forth. As to the other enquiry proposed at the beginning of the chapter; surely, being so great a boon, and coming from the hand of our risen LORD—a spiritual power breathed forth upon His disciples for the saving of many souls—Absolution does deserve thankful acceptance, serious consideration, and the utmost pains taken for a profitable use thereof. Though it be not always a "passing from death unto life," it is never less than "the opening of the prison to them that are bound," and the reception of the prodigal into his Father's house. If we would reflect on those two Scriptural titles, "a bond-servant of sin," "a child of GOD"—what the difference between them is as GOD sees it, and how unspeakable the gain to have exchanged the former state for the latter—we should never "despise the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering," who by a means so suited to our deepest needs, encourages us to hope in His tender mercy for ever and ever.

IX. In this as in other sacraments, the priest is simply CHRIST'S minister. He is guided by the HOLY SPIRIT to a right discretion; but his business in absolving is not to become a lord over the actions of others. He interferes with nothing outside the recital made to him, except what may

¹ S. Aug. (*De Trinit.* lib. xv., cap. xxvi. 45-47.)

indicate the sincerity, or otherwise, of his penitent's condition.¹

His authority, however, cannot be questioned. "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." The Church of England has curtailed the form of Ordination in some other respects, but those words she has not attempted to erase.² The priest, says Bishop Andrewes, may be but as "the pipe of wood," which, however, "by transmitting the water makes the garden to bear herbs and flowers, though itself never bears any." "Leave the men to GOD, to whom they stand or fall: let the ordinances of GOD stand fast. CHRIST'S breath goeth into and through every act of their office or ministry, and by them conveyeth His saving grace unto us all."³ Which agrees exactly with S. Chrysostom:—"Neither angel nor archangel can work anything [in addition] to what are given from GOD: the FATHER, SON, and HOLY SPIRIT, dispenseth all things. But the priest lends his tongue, and supplies his hand [for the ministry"].⁴ And yet it was not CHRIST'S intention that the minister's part should be merely mechanical. For His word to His apostles was, "Receive ye the HOLY GHOST;" and, before, "The HOLY GHOST shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." And, "The Spirit of truth shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall declare it unto you."

POSTSCRIPT I.—It will be seen that, in this small book, I have not attempted to discuss the nature of Divine Forgiveness. For myself it is enough to believe that God, "according to the multitude of His mercies, does so put away the sins of those who truly repent, that He *remembers them no more.*" So "JESUS, that He might sanctify the people through

¹ This will be considered again, under the head of Satisfaction, in Chaps. ix. and x.

² All the more remarkable, as it would have been easy to strike them out, on the plea of their not occurring in the primitive Forms of Ordination.

³ See Andrewes' *Works* (vol. iii., Sermon ix., "Of the sending of the HOLY GHOST.")

⁴ See S. Chrys. (*In Joann xx. 22*) Hom. lxxxvi.

His own Blood, suffered without the gate," "bearing our sins in His own Body to the tree" outside the holy city, as the Lamb of God, "*taking away the sin of the world.*" By accepting sacramental absolution, we are much strengthened in the happy conviction, that this merciful oblivion on God's part is no mere amnesty, but is accompanied by spiritual renewal of the penitent; who is regarded as once more capable of the life of Divine sonship. It would be almost superfluous to allude here to the very able treatment of the question of forgiveness, in the late Dr. Moberly's *Atonement and Personality*. But can those who hold the Catholic doctrine of Absolution require to be told that God's reconciliation is not more retrospective than prospective? not so much a sentence of indemnity for the past, as a cure of the disease of sin?

POSTSCRIPT II.—This is not a commentary on the Book of Common Prayer; but I have been reminded, that some more particular mention ought to have been made of the General Forms of Confession and Absolution which occur in our Matins and Communion Office. We have grown up with these, in the Church of England; and many of us find them both useful and comforting. They may be compared with what are found in the Offices of Prime and Compline: where the *hebdomadarius* and the choir, each in turn, without specifying the sins committed,^{*} own to a *maxima culpa*, and pray for each other to have mercy from God: after which the *hebdomadarius* adds, "Indulgentiam, absolutionem, et remissionem peccatorum nostrorum tribuat nobis omnipotens et misericors Dominus." In all these cases, the confessions are intended to be made by persons in a state of grace; and it seems most natural that the heavy self-accusation should refer to sins already repented of; which God's children still own by a humble retrospect from time to time,

^{*} That is, as the Offices are usually said at the present time; whatever may have been the ancient practice in monasteries. The comparison, however, is not exact; for, in the old Offices, the Absolution is "in the form of a prayer suitable to be said by all alike in mutual interchange; but here [in our Matins] it is declaratory and ministerial." (Procter and Frere's *New History of the Book of Common Prayer*, p. 371.) The uncertainty is as to the intention of the ministerial act. In the Communion Office, it is nearly certain that a *conveyance* of remission of sins to the contrite was intended: because the form of absolution is taken from the *Order* of 1548, in which the priest was bidden to "pause a while, to see if any man will withdraw himself: and if he perceive any so to do, then let him commune with him privately at convenient leisure, and see whether he can with good exhortation bring him to grace: and after a little pause, the priest shall say," etc. Thus the absolution which followed would be addressed only to those supposed on evidence to be penitent, and would come as the climax to a definite exercise of repentance. This disposes of Maskell's objection, that if this were a real pardon, there would have been no force in the previous invitation, "Let him come to me," etc. For that might mean, "Come *now*—at once!"

because their earthly trial still goes on, and they stand in view of a great account to be rendered after death. I know that many devout persons would include their present sins of infirmity among those by which they "have erred and strayed from God's ways like lost sheep." But there is no real humility in exaggeration. We can hardly judge, indeed, of the wonderful depths of contrition and self-abasement to which saints have attained: S. Paul with his "less than the least," S. Vincent de Paul calling himself "*ce misérable*," were perfectly honest. But such expressions would not be real to all of us. Small daily faults (inattention while at prayer, infirmity of temper, lack of exactness in speech, delay in doing little acts of kindness, and the like), do not exile any of CHRIST's flock from His fold, nor send them forth to the bleak mountains where the wolves are. Of such souls it cannot be said that "there is no health in them." We may all use these general confessions, but for many people they should be either a "remembrance," which, though of a time long past, is still "grievous;" or else take the shape of fervent intercessions for those now "out of the way;" for we are "members one of another." And what is spoken after is not strictly an absolution, since those present are not supposed to be "tied and bound;" (or, if they are, cannot be "loosed" without explicit confession of what is personal to themselves). But it is an assurance of peace to the conscience, given to those who truly love God, and grieve for their offence against Him; though that were in little things, or long ago. Another view is, that the priest stands up to *show the way* to reconciliation. He promises his ministry to those who shall be ready to seek it, after they, and all present, have besought the "Almighty God, who desireth not the death of a sinner," to grant "true repentance and His HOLY SPIRIT." It is thus that Keble may have understood the Absolutions of the Divine Office, in his well-known lines—

"Each morn and eve, the golden keys

Are lifted in the sacred hand,

To show the sinner on his knees

Where heaven's bright doors wide open stand."

(*Lyra Apostolica*: "The Three Absolutions.")

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER VII.

QUOTATIONS are subjoined from Hooker and Jeremy Taylor; not as if we were bound by their authority (for the Church of England has not canonised these or any other Doctors of her own), but because of the high regard in which their names are held, and the great interest they took in the subject.

The Sixth Book of the *Ecclesiastical Polity* was considered by Keble to be a "rough draft, wrongly inserted into the great work." It does

not deserve the same respectful attention as (for instance) the 77th chapter of book v. Yet the following extracts are interesting; although Hooker's hand in them is chiefly that of a compiler:—

"The greatest thing which made men forward and willing upon their knees to confess whatsoever they had committed against God, and in no wise to be withheld from the same with any fear of disgrace, contempt, or obloquy, which might ensue, was their fervent desire to be helped and assisted with the prayers of God's saints. Wherein as S. James doth exhort unto mutual confession, alleging this only for a reason, that just men's devout prayers are of great avail with God: so it hath been heretofore the use of penitents for that intent to unburthen their minds, even to private persons, and to crave their prayers." He then gives quotations from various Fathers, and among others from S. Gregory of Nyssa¹:—"Humble thyself, and take unto thee such of thy brethren as are of one mind, and do bear kind affection toward thee, that they may together mourn and labour for thy deliverance. . . . Make the priest, as a father, partaker of thy affliction and grief: be bold to impart unto him the things that are most secret: he will have care both of thy safety and of thy credit." And this from Tertullian²:—"The Church is as CHRIST Himself: when thou dost, therefore, put forth thy hands to the knees of thy brethren, thou touchest CHRIST: it is CHRIST unto whom thou art a suppliant: so when they pour out their tears over them, it is even CHRIST that taketh compassion . . . neither can that be easily denied, for which the SON is Himself contented to become a suitor." (Book vi. chap. iv. 7.)

When he comes to the practical question, although he allows that "the churches of Germany" [Protestant] are agreed "that all men should, at certain times, confess their offences to God in the hearing of God's ministers," he would have private confession resorted to only by those who are much disquieted in conscience, and distrustful of themselves, so that they cannot find peace in any other way." (Chap. iv. 16.)

Instead whereof, he proposes this as a better alternative³:—"Seeing

¹ This quotation is verified by Keble, as taken from an *Oratio in eos qui alios acerbè judicant*: not published in Greek.

² The reference is to Tertullian *De Pœnitentia*, cap. x.

³ No doubt many pious persons to this day use the General Confession with Hooker's intention. And yet, as everybody knows, Hooker himself went regularly to confession to Saravia! For other Anglican or "Anglo-Catholic" authorities, the reader is referred to Maskell's *Doctrine of Absolution*, chap. ii. He quotes Cosin, Sparrow, L'Estrange, Bingham, and a few more; but there is little agreement among them. The Absolution at Matins, in particular, has always been a source of perplexity to those who were not content to accept it as a declaration of God's mercy to sinners. Cosin indeed thought that its intention was *prospective*: it was to assure the people that the prayers in which they

day by day we in our Church begin our public prayers to Almighty God with public acknowledgment of our sins; in which confession every man, prostrate as it were before His glorious Majesty, crieth guilty against himself, and the minister with one sentence pronounceth universally all clear, whose acknowledgment thus made hath proceeded from a pure penitent mind; what reason is there every man should not, under the general terms of confession, represent to himself his own particulars whatsoever, and adjoining thereto that affection which a contrite spirit worketh, embrace to as full effect the words of Divine grace, as if the same were severally and particularly uttered with addition of solemnities for the strengthening of man's affiance in God's peculiar mercy towards them?" (Chap. iv. 15.)

Jeremy Taylor (*Doctrine and Practice of Repentance*, chap. x. sect. 4):—"Confession to a priest, the minister of pardon and reconciliation, the curate of souls, and the guide of consciences, is of so great use and benefit to all that are heavily laden with their sins, that they who carelessly neglect it are neither lovers of the peace of consciences, nor careful for the advantages of their souls. . . . There are many cases of conscience, which the penitent cannot determine, many necessities which he does not perceive, many duties which he omits, many abatements of duty which he ignorantly or presumptuously does make, much partiality in the determination of his own interests: and to build up a soul requires so much wisdom, so much severity, so many arts, such caution and observance, such variety of notices, great learning, great prudence, great piety; that as all ministers are not worthy of that charge . . . so, it is certain, there are not many of the people that can worthily and sufficiently do it themselves: and, therefore, although . . . it cannot be said that God hath by an express law required it . . . yet to some persons it hath put on so many degrees of charity and prudence, and is so apt to minister to their superinduced needs; that although to do it is not a necessary obedience, yet it is a necessary charity: it is not necessary in respect of a positive express commandment, yet it is in order to certain ends, which cannot so well be provided for by any other instrument."

Elsewhere, when Jeremy Taylor combats extreme views of the sacramental necessity of Penitence, he shows himself somewhat inconsistent with what has just been quoted, and adopts what he supposes to have been the opinion of S. Chrysostom, Cassian, and Laurence of Novara, against having recourse to a priest. But in the passage above he is certainly a warm advocate of the practice. Ascetic writers like Origen, S. Basil, and S. Leo, seem to have had great weight with him, and he fully admits that sick souls do need a physician, and that

were about to join would be acceptable: ("Wherefore let us beseech Him," etc.) See Cosin's *Works*, vol. v. 443.

confession is the means to obtain one. He states this very plainly in *The Golden Grove* :—

“There is great use of holy confession ; which, though it be not generally in all cases, and peremptorily, commanded, as if without it no salvation could possibly be had ; yet you are advised by the Church, under whose discipline you live, that, before you are to receive the Holy Sacrament, or when you are visited with any dangerous sickness, if you find any one particular sin, or more, that lies heavy upon you, [you are] to disburden yourself of it into the bosom of your confessor, who not only stands between God and you to pray for you, but hath the power of the keys committed to him, upon your true repentance, to absolve you in CHRIST’S Name from those sins which you have confessed to him.”

Jeremy Taylor’s view of Absolution was, however, peculiar (as will be noticed in the next chapter). In his *Holy Dying*, he actually substitutes a form of his own for that in the Visitation of the Sick, carefully striking out the mention of CHRIST’S “authority committed” to His minister. But when he speaks of confession he is generally most helpful. Thus, in another section of his *Treatise on Repentance*, the substance of what he says is, “Make confession always for the glory of GOD, with sincerity, simplicity, truthfulness. Yet with reserve ; and accuse yourself, not others. To reveal others’ sins in confession is a direct defamation. Let not shame deter : the greater the shame, the more glorious the repentance. Whereas, sins unconfessed are most commonly unpardoned, and sins unpardoned will be punished before the angels.” Together with other rules and suggestions, all most pious and edifying.¹

It is a pleasure to add the following from that most admirable bishop, Thomas Ken, who, in his *Manual for Winchester Scholars*, charges “Philothous”—“Not to be ashamed to unburthen his soul freely . . . that, besides ghostly counsel, he may receive the benefit of absolution : for . . . confession to our spiritual guide is by many devout souls found to be very advantageous to true repentance.”

Bishop Andrewes is quoted at the end of Chap. viii.

¹ It would be no bad plan to learn all one can about confession from Jeremy Taylor, and then betake ourselves to Andrewes for instruction on the ministry of absolution. Each of these great divines is strong where the other is weak, and *vice versa*. Bishop Andrewes often heard confessions ; but in his famous sermon on S. John xx. 23 he says not a word on that side of our duty.

CHAPTER VIII.

Objections Considered.

[This chapter could not well have been spared ; but the author hopes that those of his readers who are not objectors, will at once pass on to Chapter ix. He himself has no appetite for controversy, and would gladly have waited for others, better equipped, to enter these lists.]

OBJECTIONS must next be considered. They are many, and strenuously urged. Perhaps their number may take off a little from their great importance, and suggest a possibility that those attacking may be exhausted before very long. If the first objections raised had been victorious, would so many more have been placed on the field ?

Yet, it is scarcely to be supposed that our defence will appear successful at every point. When a treasure like Absolution is found in poor "earthen vessels," some people will persist in declaring that the vessels are not fit to hold it. Nor can we doubt that some of the arguments still brought to the front have a long Protestant tradition behind them.

It would be vain to deny that, in the world at large, the number of opponents of this means of grace is very considerable. Dislike of the clergy may be a motive in many cases, aided by contempt for their spiritual pretensions. In some instances there will have been foolish assumption on the priest's part, to excuse or justify ill-feeling. The opposition is chiefly of feeling ; and, whatever that amounts to, one cannot say that there is often enough of actual violence with it to suggest persecution. Of course, such a thing might very well be. Our Master, Himself "despised and rejected of men," warned His

disciples that, for His sake, they too would be "hated of all:" "yea, the hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he doeth GOD service." But there is no such cruel rage at the present day; and although persecution is sometimes threatened, our adversaries are soon tired or ashamed; so that the victim commonly escapes unscathed. We are not now under the Long Parliament.

Yet the dislike is bitter enough; and, from the Protestant point of view, not unreasonable. One cannot be surprised that offence is taken at an assertion of judicial authority over men's consciences, such as Absolution is thought to imply. And the indignation felt is all the greater, because for a long time the English Church was content to do her work almost without Absolution;¹ just as, even now, many clergymen leave that part of their office in abeyance. Indeed the neglect is still palpable, and has its effect upon the laity, even against their real convictions. For few things are harder than to keep up respect for a name that is had everywhere "in derision," and made "a proverb of reproach."

Under circumstances like these, we, and those, equally, with whom we hope to pursue a friendly argument, should endeavour to rid the mind of prejudice. Unless we are willing to make this effort, we shall assuredly labour in vain. Let both sides have a fair hearing, and each make the best of his own case.

I. Of the more respectable objections, one, which deserves attention, is when people ask how it was that the apostles never asserted or used this pretended power of theirs, to remit or to retain sins? That sort of argument has a certain degree of force, not to be ignored; and it has been employed from our own point of view, in an earlier chapter: when, against S. Chrysostom's exalted doctrine of the keys as viewed in the hands of S. Peter, was set the more measured though very real respect shown by that illustrious Father to S. Peter's successor

¹ Except, of course, that the two general forms were always used, at Matins and at Holy Communion; and some clergymen would occasionally read the first Exhortation to Holy Communion, on to the end. There were also a few pious people who went to confession; see the Introduction to Chaps. v. and vi.

in his own day.¹ His practice, we thought, must be preferred to his rhetoric. But there is no true parallel between that case and this. What S. Chrysostom may have written, hyperbolically, is one thing: what our Blessed LORD said with plenary authority to His apostles, is another. The refusal of the apostles to absolve, if it were so, could not invalidate a commission from the lips of Him who is the Truth, and whose witness to Himself was, that "all power was given unto Him in heaven and in earth." Human practice cannot be put before Divine precept.

But now what are the facts? Is it so, that "there is not a single instance to be found in the Acts, of any apostle using such absolution after confession, nor any trace in the Pastoral Epistles of such confession and absolution being recommended?"² Yes, this is true, or nearly true. A number of people at Ephesus who had "believed," (that is, had received baptism,³) being conscience-stricken, came to S. Paul "confessing and showing their deeds:" but we do not hear that he absolved them. And although S. Timothy is bidden to "lay hands" on others, the allusion there is to Ordination, not the reconciliation of sinners.⁴ Perhaps S. Luke's object in Acts xix. may have been to record a great wave of conversion—what the apostle called the "opening of a great door" to him at Ephesus—and so he might naturally pass over minor incidents, which would be inferred from his account without special mention. But it is impossible to tell. As regards the Pastoral Epistles, we may advance a more positive opinion, that S. Paul was not instructing "his son Timothy" how to administer sacraments, but drawing a pattern of right government, by which he should bear rule in the Church. Still, there is no allusion to the power of the keys; and our objector will seem to have carried his point. However, he ought not, anyhow, to have omitted the story of the incestuous Corinthian, in 1 Cor. v.

¹ See one of the foot-notes to Chap. vii.

² From Bishop J. C. Ryle's *Commentary on S. John xx.*

³ The "believers" in Acts xix. 18 would be distinct from the unbaptized sorcerers in the next verse.

⁴ See Liddon's *Explanatory Analysis of the First Epistle to Timothy*, p. 67.

and 2 Cor. ii. One may grant that there is no decisive proof, even there: yet the passage is worth considering. Perhaps what S. Paul gave to that man, on his sincere repentance, was an indulgence, (as it would have been called later;) not the forgiveness of his sin, but a remission of the remainder of his punishment. He had been "delivered unto Satan:" that is, he had received the greater excommunication, removing from him that protection against Satan's assault which is only promised within the Church's Communion.¹ Afterwards, when he repented, S. Paul "forgave;" but the word in the original² might rather be translated "indulged;" and the faithful joined their "indulgence" with that of their chief pastor. On the other hand, when S. Paul says that he acted "in the person of CHRIST," one would suppose that he looked to CHRIST as Priest and Advocate, and took His authority to cleanse the unhappy man from his guilt. A cleansing there must have been, before any indulgence could be granted: why not a sacramental cleansing? Nor do all the Fathers see an indulgence here: S. Ambrose calls it a "remission," meaning probably an absolution.³ This passage must be left as doubtful, but not dismissed as if it had no bearing on the point in dispute.

Again, it is obvious that texts declaring the "royal priesthood" of Christians cannot be pressed into the service.⁴ Apostles knew of such a hierarchy, but it embraced all the citizens of CHRIST'S kingdom, and its business was "to offer the sacrifice of praise," not to make atonement for transgressions. (Except as all were concerned in the work of conversion; which will be considered presently.)

Still, one cannot agree with objections founded on the

¹ On 1 Tim. i. 20, Liddon's comment is, "Exclusion from the Church of God by excommunication implies surrender to 'the prince of this world,' who reigns outside it, and seizes those who pass the frontier."

² *κεχάρισμαι*. But Dr. Swete says that this word = *ἀφιέναι*, comparing Ephes. iv. 32.

³ S. Ambrose (*De Pæn.* ii. 7) joins the tenth verse of 2 Cor. ii. with the fifteenth, and says, "S Paul could declare that we are 'a sweet savour of CHRIST in them that are saved,' because he had made the house at Corinth sweet *unguento apostolicæ remissionis*."

⁴ 1 S. Pet. ii. 9; Rev. i. 6.

apostles' silence and supposed inaction. One would not wish to escape by pretending that there were no post-baptismal sins to engage their attention ; for, indeed, the instance just quoted from Corinth proves the contrary, and S. Peter in his Second Epistle, has some stern things to say about those who had "turned back" or lapsed. But the point is this. First, the Book of the Acts contains acts of *apostles*, not of priests.¹ Then, the Epistles are fatherly counsels of apostles to their converts, full of glorious doctrine, but not entering into matters liturgical, nor supplying guidance for the various functions of the sacred ministry. Thus it is too little to ask, Why did not the apostles mention Absolution? or, Why has not S. Luke recorded an instance of their binding and loosing? One must be prepared with a wider question, Why did not S. Paul baptize? or, Why is there no mention of the form used by him, or by S. Peter, when the disciples "came together to break the Bread?" But in truth, when the apostle of the Gentiles pleaded that CHRIST sent him "not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel," he covered the whole ground, and apologised for his lack of attention to some other matters, scarcely less important than baptism. His part, as founder and ruler, was to preach and convert, to "ordain elders," to have "the care of all the churches." To administer sacraments would be the province of "pastors and teachers," whom he left behind him.

Some may perhaps remind us that this does not exhaust the argument from silence. For it is not as if apostles had had nothing to say about the forgiveness of sins. See, on the contrary, what S. Paul writes to the Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians ; or the exceedingly copious teaching of S. John in his first Epistle. But *they* always point direct to CHRIST the Saviour ; never to a mere human instrument.

The answer is still of the same kind. New Testament writers give us the foundation of our faith and practice : they do not tell us how, on the strength of what we believe, we

¹ The apostles, of course, performed the office of priests, in the fullest and in every sense : but in the Book of Acts they are shown exercising duties *peculiar* to apostles, in founding and establishing churches.

should approach GOD by prayer and praise. S. John, for example, is especially the theologian of the Incarnation, and its extension by sacraments. He has a great deal to impart on the new birth of water and the Spirit, and on the gift of eternal life through eating CHRIST'S Flesh and drinking His Blood. But S. John never speaks of Baptism and Holy Communion as regular means of grace, ordained by CHRIST and observed by His Church. With forgiveness of sins after baptism he adopts the same course. In his Gospel he indeed mentions the grant of authority to forgive, by our LORD, after the Resurrection; but in his Epistle—whether written before or after the Gospel is of no consequence—he is silent as to the working out of that commission, and simply points to the great Intercession in heaven, from which all priestly acts derive their value. "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye may not sin. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the FATHER, JESUS CHRIST the righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins." If S. John had proceeded in any way but this, his treatment of the forgiveness of sins would have been at variance with what he had said of our union with CHRIST through eating His Flesh; but now, just as the language of that sixth chapter really necessitates the priest's office to celebrate, so does the language of the Epistle invite ministerial Absolution.¹ And it is impossible to read at all carefully the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel, without perceiving our LORD'S intention to delegate much to His disciples. "FATHER, I manifested Thy Name unto the men whom Thou gavest Me out of the world. . . . The words which Thou gavest Me I have given unto them, and they received them. . . . I am no more in the world, and these are in the world, and I come to Thee. . . . As Thou didst send Me into the world, even so sent I them into the world. . . . And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given unto them ;

¹ Archbishop Alexander (*The Epistles of S. John*, p. 199) says :—"This Epistle . . . with its deep and mystic realisation of the double flow from the pierced side upon the Cross . . . unquestionably has the sacramental sense diffused throughout it. The Sacraments are not in obtrusive prominence; yet for those who have eyes to see they lie in deep and tender distances."

. . . that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and lovedst them, even as Thou lovest Me." Whether our LORD here intended to bestow a special blessing on their work of recovering penitents, we cannot tell; but one would think that their association with their Divine Master could nowhere be more intimate than in that.¹ S. Paul, too, though the records of what he did in this respect are scanty, must have owned a real obligation of the kind when he wrote as follows:—"All things are of GOD, who reconciled us to Himself through CHRIST, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that GOD was in CHRIST reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of reconciliation. We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of CHRIST, as though GOD were intreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of CHRIST, be ye reconciled to GOD. Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf; that ye might become the righteousness of GOD in Him. And working together with Him we intreat also that ye receive not the grace of GOD in vain."² Words which, if they do not of necessity involve a power of the keys, are surely germane to that, and consistent with it from first to last.

II. Let us turn next to an objection from a different point of view. Hitherto it has been urged that there neither is, nor ever was, any ministerial Absolution in the Church, because the apostles—so it is pretended—never absolved those who came to them repenting and believing. Now on the contrary, we are to hear that the whole Church of the baptized, laity as well as clergy, have been engaged in a great work of reconciliation through all the ages; and that this was what our Saviour intended and commanded. What shall we think about this?

All depends upon what action of the Church is meant. In one sense, this theory is abundantly and gloriously true. So far from contradicting, we meet it with full and thankful acceptance. The authority with which ministerial or sacerdotal acts of the Catholic Church are invested, belongs to them inasmuch as they are acts of the mystical Body of CHRIST, which He

¹ Compare S. Luke xxiv. 46-50.

² 2 Cor. v. 18-vi. 2.

fills with His own life and energy by the HOLY SPIRIT His breath.¹ Now, that mystical Body is the whole communion of the faithful, of which each separate member has been taken into vital union with JESUS CHRIST—an union commenced in Baptism, sustained and increased by the Holy Eucharist, and which is the foretaste of the heavenly glory. Again, this whole communion of the “saints” is GOD’S Ecclesia, which, as a Divine Society chosen out of the world, He sends forth into the world, that it may convert the world to His obedience. Therefore, whether we consider vital energies stored in the Church, or the Church’s mission to mankind, there can be no detaching the clergy from the faithful laity. All must partake in the various functions enjoined, and among others, in the ministering of GOD’S forgiveness to the contrite. That is an essential part of the duty laid upon the whole of CHRIST’S Body. To take the laity away, would be as if one confined the whole vitality of a frame within one of its organs. In the spiritual order, that is impossible. No part “can say to another part, I have no need of thee.” S. Paul’s doctrine of corporate solidarity and interdependence is what everybody knows. Consequently, in whatever efforts the clergy make for the salvation of souls, they trust to have the laity with them. “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the Word of the LORD may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you.” This was fully recognised in the early Church, where (as we saw in Chap. iv.) congregations would meet to add the force of united supplication to the bishop’s own prayers for the penitents. *Condoleat universum corpus* (said Tertullian) *et ad remedium conlaboret*. And our English Bishop Andrewes has recognised the same duty; when, in that beautiful *Fourth Day Exercise* of his, after mention made of “the honourable Presbytery, and all the clergy,” he adds, “Remember, LORD, our brethren around

¹ This is what S. Augustine appears to mean, when he says that S. Peter received the keys, not as an individual, but representing the whole Church:—“Quod enim ad ipsum proprie pertinet, natura unus homo erat, gratiâ unus Christianus, abundantiore gratiâ unus idemque primus apostolus: sed quando ei dictum est, Tibi dabo claves regni cœlorum etc. . . . universam significabat Ecclesiam. (*Tractat. cxxiv. In S. Joann. Evang.*)

us, and praying with us in this holy hour, for their zeal and earnestness' sake."¹

One might have hoped, therefore, that controversy would be at an end. We all desire that the conversion of sinners should be made the business of the whole Church, and believe that that was the will of our Divine Master. None of us would underrate the consecration of the faithful laity, nor the holiness of their calling, nor the importance and dignity of their service.

And yet there is a fear that some, who would use this language, may intend to pit the laity against the clergy, so as to discourage the latter from thinking to become GOD'S agents in any sense peculiar to their order.² They want, indeed, to establish, not a "royal priesthood" of clergy and laity, but a secular level for all alike. However, it is neither necessary nor safe to pry into motives.³ What one has to do is to lay down certain conditions which must be maintained *together with* what has been called the larger view.⁴

The whole Church is sent into the world, in His Name who "came not to judge the world, but to save it." Yet each member must serve in that "vocation and ministry" which are his own: not in some other, to which he has received no calling. "It is not lawful" (we read in our Article xxiii.) "for any man to take upon him the office of publick preaching, or ministering the Sacraments in the Congregation, before he be lawfully called, and sent to execute the same . . . by men who have publick authority given unto them," etc.⁵ In other words,

¹ μνησθητι Κύριε τῶν περιστάσεων ἡμῶν ἀδελφῶν καὶ συνευχομένῳ ἡμῶν ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ ἁγίᾳ ᾠρᾷ.

² Theophylact had expressed himself to the effect that a layman, by forgiving his enemy, might loose him, and have him loosed in heaven. Jewel took this to mean that a layman's absolution was literally the same thing as a priest's! (See Jewel's *Works*, vol. iv. 494-496.)

³ Mr. Drury has the justice to say of Tindale, that "By imputing motives, he does not strengthen his plain statement of facts." (*Conf. and Absol.* p. 54.)

⁴ The ecclesiastical power of secular persons, said Thorndike, is "cumulative, not destructive" to the proper power of the clergy. What is true of discipline is true also of administering sacraments; and true *a fortiori*.

⁵ I am afraid it must be allowed that the language of Article xxiii. is vagueness itself. If Cranmer wrote it, he probably meant that those who "minister publicly in the congregation" do so by the King's licence,

to administer Sacraments belongs only to those duly sent forth by the chief pastors of the Church. Before one can enter on that part of the work of saving souls, he must have received what the apostle in writing to S. Timothy, called a special "gift of GOD, which is in thee through the laying on of my hands." This is the first thing to be specified as a condition unalterable.

The next is, that Absolution, as CHRIST ordained it, comes under this head, of sacraments reserved for his priests only. Let us avoid contentious matter, by all means, while we may. But we cannot pass by the notable fact that the Fathers, if they wrote about the Church's Penitence at all, were quite sure to treat it as inseparable from the priest's office. (Unless, of course, they were alluding to venial faults.) "Only those," says S. Cyprian, "who bear office in the Church, and are set there by the LORD'S ordering, may . . . bestow remission of sins."¹ S. Ambrose says that only priests are permitted to bind and loose; the Church claiming this right, because she has true priests.² And again, that the power to remit sins by penitence was given first to the apostles, who derived it from the virtue of our LORD'S breathing on them the HOLY GHOST; and that the apostles transmitted the same to those ministering the priest's office.³ We do not defer to the Fathers as infallible. Still, their testimony has its proper place in history; and very remarkable, surely, is this concurrence of opinion among them—so many ascribing these high spiritual prerogatives to the clergy, and denying them, equally, to all who had not been ordained.

revocable when he pleases; and that there need be no sacred ministry at all unless the King chooses to have it. Happily, whatever astounding opinions Cranmer may have propounded in his *Questions and Answers on the Sacraments*, he left this article so vaguely worded as to be patient of a Catholic interpretation. Otherwise we may be sure that it would have undergone a radical alteration at one of the subsequent revisions. We ought to say, too, that Article xxiii. is concerned with the Mission of the clergy rather than with their Ordination, though the latter is implied.

¹ S. Cypr., *Ep.* lxxiii. See also *De Lapsis*, 19.

² S. Ambr., *De Pœnit.* lib. i. cap. 2.

³ *De Pœnit.* lib. ii. cap. 2. See also *De Spir. Sancto*, lib. iii. cap. 18 quoted near the end of this chapter.

But most persons will prefer to turn to S. John xx., and simply read the passage over for themselves, without prepossession or prejudice. Surely, then, you would say that the Master was here qualifying His disciples by a very special gift for a very special charge which He was laying upon them? "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." The apostles are to judge and discriminate between consciences, and so, not blindly, but under a most solemn responsibility, to absolve or refuse absolution. CHRIST'S special gift of the HOLY GHOST at once endues them with a capacity from Himself, and distinguishes them from others of His own followers. Indeed, if some learned critic, after reading those sacred words, should opine that they applied to none, even of the clergy, except those few apostles to whom our LORD was actually speaking,* one would be much less surprised than one is by being told that they were addressed to the whole crowd of believers. What? Was every Christian, then, to be a key-bearer for his neighbour's benefit? Were all the baptized, down to the youngest adult, able, just by a kind word or a prayer, to assure guilty souls that their chains were broken for ever?

Not so, you may answer. We are thinking of a restoration of character, granted to persons who had been in disgrace. That is all that absolution means—a public reconciliation, in which not only do the laity take equal parts with the clergy, but, as we should prefer to put it, the forgiveness is from the congregation at large, the clergy merely acting as spokesmen.

Now here the author ought to allow that he has avoided the question of ecclesiastical punishments and pardons, perhaps too much. That almost martyr for discipline, Bishop Wilson of Sodor and Man, would hardly have approved of such a politic silence. In ancient times a great feature was made of the comprehensive voice of excommunication, issuing from the whole body of the faithful; when the bishop pronounced

* Some such idea was mooted by Calvin: the power did not go beyond the apostles, and was merely local. He might have borrowed this from Tertullian, *De Pudic.* 21. It has been well refuted by Andrewes (*Sermons*, vol. v. p. 91).

judgment on CHRIST'S behalf, and the whole community inflicted punishment by separating the offender from their communion; or again, afterwards, joined with the bishop in remitting the whole or part, when they were certified of the offender's repentance. The Presbyterians tried to revive this in an amended form of their own, but could never gain a permanent footing for it in England.¹ Practically, wherever judgment by the laity has been tried, the Reformed bodies have been obliged to elect elders as their representatives; and it has not been easy to escape the evils incidental to an oligarchy.² But, on the other hand, the duty of a bishop to excommunicate, when the reasons appear sufficient, is undeniable now as ever; and when it is requisite that a member should be actually cut off from church-membership till he repents, the bishop's responsibility ought to be shared, as far as possible, by the clergy and communicants (as some Colonial Dioceses now provide by their Canons).

We should admit farther, to our opponents, that, were the Church's public discipline restored after these precedents, there would be nothing improper in applying to it the words commonly used of absolution, viz., "binding and loosing," or "the power of the keys." At least, the Council of Trent enacted that priests should use their keys for binding, "in chastisement of past sins"³ (that would be, when they imposed satisfaction, or "penance" after confession). And the Primitive Church was wont to use the same language when speaking of persons deposed by the act of a Council.⁴ The Council's sentence was supposed to have a "binding" force, in the sense of S. Matt. xviii. 18.

But all this does not make a strong case against the stricter

¹ For its unpopularity, see Mr. Hutton's *History of the English Church under Charles I. and the Commonwealth*, p. 144.

² The Kirk of Scotland assigns lay elders, as assessors to the pastors and doctors, for execution of discipline. Excommunication is pronounced after three admonitions:—"This his sin we bind, and pronounce the same bound in heaven and earth," etc. (From Canon W. R. Churton's *Defence of Engl. Ordinal*.)

³ *Concil. Trident.* Sess. xiv. cap. viii.

⁴ See Bright's *Age of the Fathers*, vol. ii. p. 348, for the case of Cyril and Memnon, deposed by the Oriental party at Ephesus.

use of the terms. Binding or loosing by the infliction of penalties, or removal of the same, may be a good addition—or, in some cases, even a necessary public witness—to the Church's spiritual treatment of souls. But the sacrament is independent of the discipline. Absolution, even when pronounced in public (as many think that it was in ancient times), was always the remission of sins, and as such will for ever hold its place in the scheme of redemption. "The Church obeys CHRIST, by both binding and loosing sin: . . . this right is permitted to priests only."¹ That was the voice of the fourth century, and, indeed, of the first also. "You who have caused sedition," says S. Clement of Rome, "submit yourselves to the priests, and let them train you unto repentance, bowing the knees of your heart."

What exiles a man from the Kingdom of Heaven is the sin of which he has been guilty. That deprives him of his sonship, and puts him down among the slaves and bondsmen of Satan. To restore such an one is a task in every way greater than the abridgment of a punishment which human law or custom might inflict on public criminals. For this is required the power of the risen LORD, and His breathing of the HOLY GHOST on men specially set apart for the work. Thus only can we realise the majestic import of that greeting and commission, "Peace be unto you: as the FATHER hath sent Me, even so send I you." We must have the men specially set apart. And yet, be it remembered, the laity are not unconcerned, even with this most sacred ministry of forgiveness. For not only is it possible that the penitent may owe his conversion to their prayers, but his restoration can hardly be so private as not to have their implicit consent, when they, as it were, open their ranks to receive him, returning to GOD'S Altar. S. Matthew xviii. 17 is partly applicable here. So is 2 Cor. ii. 6, 7; and possibly, also, Gal. vi. 1, 2.

III. After the first objectors, who would eliminate absolution entirely, and the second who would have it non-ministerial, we come to a third sort, who, accepting the limitation to the apostles and their successors, are yet resolved not to allow

¹ S. Ambr. *De Pæn.* lib. i. cap. 2.

them any judicial discretion in binding and loosing, nor power to work a spiritual change.

Either—which is the favourite theory—CHRIST'S ministers absolve sinners by preaching CHRIST crucified, or they make a general declaration of GOD'S willingness to forgive, which will have a soothing and comfortable sound to those troubled in mind. Both of these views have found favour with persons sincerely pious of the Evangelical school. To Broad Churchmen the subject is not quite so congenial, but perhaps they also would assent to one or other of these alternatives.

(1) First, *solvere est docere*. Maldonatus¹ would refute that (the Lutheran doctrine of his day²) by urging that, if it were true, the Twelve would have received nothing from their LORD but what they possessed already; nay, what had been granted in full to the seventy, and even to the Scribes and Pharisees. For the Scribes, too, held “the key of knowledge,” and sat in the *cathedra* of Moses. But this is not quite conclusive; for there would be nothing strange if our Blessed LORD, in the fresh glory of His Resurrection, full of the splendid hopes just dawning on the world, had proclaimed anew this great function of preaching, to the same men whom He would presently send out to “make disciples of all nations.” And we must remember that the strength of the “Evangelical” position lies, very justly,

¹ Maldonat. *Comm. in S. Matt. xvi*. So, too, Bishop Andrewes (*Serm. on Power of Absol.*):—“The power of preaching was given them long before, even when He sent them, and commanded them to preach the kingdom of GOD, which was done before this power was promised which was here bestowed . . . the one being given (S. Matt. x. 7), the other promised after (S. Matt. xvi. 19).”

² The Rev. T. W. Drury (*Confession and Absolution*, pp. 2, 11, 31, 48, 101), quotes largely from sixteenth-century Reformers holding the doctrine:—

Tindale: “To bind and to loose is to tell people their faults, and to preach mercy in CHRIST to all that repent.”

Bullinger: “That sins are forgiven, the ministers do assuredly declare by the preaching of the Gospel; and by that preaching do bind and loose,” etc.

Jewel: “The priest hath the same power that CHRIST had, for that he preacheth the same word of GOD.”

Fulke: “The people that believe are absolved from their sins by the ministry of the preacher.”

And he (Mr. Drury) remarks, “It is a cardinal point in these writers, that a public preaching is quite as effectual as a private ministry of reconciliation.”

in this, that their best men have so keen a perception of the virtue of declaring the glad tidings of deliverance from sin. That good news is not to be kept in reserve, or merely whispered in the ear. Preaching is to them as if they sounded the trumpet of the jubilee, proclaiming everywhere the great release, and "the acceptable year of the LORD." And although the influence of Luther is now on the wane, there must still be many who rejoice in cherishing the old "simple Gospel" of believing and being saved.¹ So, perhaps, when considering S. Matt. xvi., or S. John xx., their argument would be that no other commission could have been issued to the apostles, or to the Church, because nothing but Gospel-preaching was required to set men free. When once the word was proclaimed with power, sin's captives would be delivered, and the ancient tyranny come to an end.

Now, one would gladly welcome the opinion that conviction of sin has been due to earnest preaching. For certainly it has, times innumerable.² How else did S. John the Baptist prepare the way of CHRIST? How else should we understand that "pricking in the heart," when S. Peter, by his Pentecostal sermon, had led many to faith in the Resurrection of "JESUS, whom ye crucified?" One would like to be as inclusive as any Evangelical could desire, so long as they will not compel us to be exclusive in another direction.

But as regards the charge given in the upper room, there are certain things to be considered. First, whether our LORD did not on other occasions both before and after His Resurrection,³ give such prominence to preaching as to make allusion to it at this particular time unnecessary? To that question, however, various answers might be returned: the facts are certain, but the inference doubtful. But, again, is

¹ See S. John iii. 16; Acts x. 43; Rom. i. 16-x. 9; 1 S. John iv. 14, 15: v. 11-13.

² I should be the very last to disparage preaching as an instrument to conversion. Even in a non-Catholic "Revival," though the methods are faulty, the preacher may sometimes be a true Apollos.

³ See, for precepts, counsels, or examples of preaching, S. Matt. v., x., xiii., xxiv., xxviii.; S. Luke iii., iv., vi., viii., ix., x., xvi., xxiv.; S. John i., xv., xvii., etc.

the Protestant interpretation really satisfactory, taking the words as they stand in S. John xx. 23? When our LORD requires *discernment*, so that some sins be remitted and others retained, is it likely that He only means, "Let all men know everywhere that I came to be their Saviour?" Is this no more than a repetition of what He spake to Nicodemus, "GOD so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten SON, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life?" It might have been so, if He had kept to the usual language: if He had talked of gathering in the harvest, or proclaiming the kingdom of GOD, or appealing to mankind to believe on Him. But there is not a word here of pleading with men's wills, or convincing their understandings. Nor does He go back to the universal promise of salvation. The charge is not general; the promise is conditional; and the words do certainly seem to bear a significance which there is not in preaching sermons. Those who think otherwise must surely have their eyes a little blinded by prejudice.

(2) But next, there are many who admit that the clergy may make some sort of special declaration of GOD'S acceptance of individuals, for their comfort; and, so far, approach the Catholic doctrine of absolution. They say, indeed, what is quite true, that "no formula of absolution is recorded" from primitive times.¹ And they would prefer that any form to be used now should be precatory²—which is, again, reasonable enough—but they do not insist any longer on confining everything to the pulpit.

With this degree of agreement we ought, perhaps, to be content. At any rate we must be very grateful for it as far as it goes. Objections to the indicative form one can understand, because that is a plain, unmistakable assertion of sacerdotal power. To those of us who believe the full doctrine, "Absolvo" has the farther advantage of directing attention to

¹ Dr. Mason, at the Fulham Conference, quoted in the *Ch. Quarterly*, Jan., 1903.

² So does even Morinus (*De Pæn.* lib. viii. 8), who remarks on the avoidance of the indicative "I absolve" by CHRIST Himself:—"Quod ea Christus, quamquam possit, uti noluerit, sed humiliter dixerit, Remittuntur tibi peccata tua. Fides tua te salvam fecit."

Him who is the source of sacerdotal power. "By His authority committed unto me, I absolve:" it is the great High Priest who seems rather to be speaking, as when the word of forgiveness fell from His lips in Galilee of old. On the other hand, the precatory form is not merely primitive, but was used down to the twelfth century, and, as some say, by S. Bernard.¹ The only fear, if that were revived, would be of trusting too much to the personal piety and fervour of the *precator*. One has thought, sometimes, that, where the matter of a confession was not of the gravest, there might be no harm in substituting the form of Absolution from the Communion Office. There is no obligation to use the other except in visitation of the sick.²

We seem at last to have reached something like substantial ground of agreement. It was observed in Chap. vi. that, while forgiveness is ever ready for those who beseech GOD with true contrite hearts, many persons will desire outward assurance that their past is blotted out. But that desire leads naturally to the acceptance of absolution; this being the plainest and most authoritative assurance that can be had within the Church of GOD. Viewed in that light, we have an opinion in favour of absolution which enjoys a very large Anglican consent. For instance, both Hooker and Jeremy Taylor accept it in that sense. Both Hooker and Jeremy Taylor (very like some modern Evangelicals) approve of such a message of peace being uttered for the consolation of unquiet consciences. Hooker is satisfied that we have "first, the promises of GOD for pardon generally unto all offenders penitent;" next, may have "the unfallible testimony of a good conscience." But if we have, in addition, "the sentence of GOD'S appointed officer and vicegerent to approve with unpartial judgment the quality of that we have done," then, we "may rest ourselves very well assured touching GOD'S most merciful pardon and grace."³

¹ See S. Bernard, *Liber ad Sororem*, 27:—"Soror mihi in Christo dilecta, Deus misereatur tui, et dimittat tibi omnia peccata tua: Deus retribuatur tibi indulgentiam tuorum delictorum, Deus indulgeat tibi quicquid peccasti, Deus te lavet ab omni peccato." Eastern forms are still precatory, except the Armenian.

² Since, of course, we are not bound by the 1549 Prayer Book.

³ Hooker, book vi. chap. vi. 5.

Jeremy Taylor has the same thought:—"Because our repentances are always imperfect, and he who hates his sin with the greatest detestation, may suspect his sorrow, and be melancholy, fearful, and scrupulous; if the minister of holy things shall think fit to pronounce absolution—that is, to declare that he believes him to be a true penitent and in the state of grace, it must needs add much comfort to him, and hope of pardon, not only upon the confidence of his wisdom and spiritual learning, but even from the prayers of the holy man, and the solemnity of his ministration."¹ The same idea is apparent in Bishop Wilson of Sodor and Man, who says, "Our Church asserts, what is most true, that CHRIST'S ministers have a special commission, which other believers have not, authoritatively to declare this absolution, for the comfort of true penitents; which absolution, if duly dispensed, will have a real effect from the promise of CHRIST."² Even Dr. Pusey puts this aspect somewhat prominently forward:—"Consciences are burdened. There is a provision on the part of GOD, in His Church, to relieve them. They wish to be, and to know that they are, in a state of grace. They feel that they cannot set themselves free to serve GOD. They look for some act out of themselves . . . something to sever between past and future, that they may begin anew. By His absolving sentence, GOD does efface the past."³

One ought to admit that this view is in close agreement with the language of our Prayer Book; where the benefit of absolution is said to be for those who cannot quiet their consciences by their own efforts, and "require further comfort or counsel." Wherefore we should rejoice, feeling that we are able to have so much in common with good men who in other ways might reckon themselves our opponents. For who can doubt that this *was* sent to be a ministry of comfort; coming as it does from that sweet Saviour whose invitation we know so well—"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest?"

¹ Jer. Taylor's *Doctr. of Repentance*, chap. x. sect. 4.

² Bishop Wilson's *Sacra Privata*: "Thursday Meditations."

³ Dr. Pusey's Sermon, *Entire Absolution of the Penitent*.

So far, then, well. But yet it may be right to show in what respect the view is inadequate. Let the priest be a "son of consolation" by all means; but the consolation will be of little use *alone*. It must have something stronger than itself to rest on. Imagine first the case of persons approaching their clergyman with the one aim of being soothed and quieted. Are not such persons "weak and timorous souls," as Hooker called them? Would it not be much better for them to dispense with a soothing process which will make them weaker and more dependent, the oftener they resort to it? As to any useful effect other than soothing, absolution (according to the Protestant theory) has none. "If the sinner be not penitent, the priest cannot pardon him; if he be penitent, GOD will pardon him, whether the priest does or no."¹ If the priest does venture to say, "I absolve thee," he speaks altogether in vain, unless forgiveness has been already granted, established, and finished, in heaven.

One can easily see how, at this rate, a Protestant's acceptance of the ministerial pardon must soon cease to be cordial. If weak Christians still persist in asking for such a remedy, they must have their request granted; but it will do them no good when they have got it. On the whole, the comfortable view very decidedly fails. Kind hearts will always have loving words to bestow on the unhappy; and it is quite possible to be kind without doing injury to prudence and self-reliance, or—as one should say rather—reliance by faith on a Divine Comforter. But that is not to adhere to the original institution of JESUS CHRIST, which we are now considering. Whatever else absolution was meant for, its primary intention was to renew the life of grace in souls once regenerate, afterwards fallen from the grace of their baptism. It was a gift of the HOLY GHOST from the risen LORD. Entirely through failing to observe this, famous writers like Jeremy Taylor have reduced a great means of grace to a level with the "weak and beggarly elements;" and have been guilty of the absurdity of reversing the order, as if our LORD had said, "Whatsoever hath been loosed in heaven ye shall loose—or

¹ Jer. Taylor's *Doctr. of Repentance*, chap. x.

declare to be loosed—on earth.” Of course, if there were nothing more in absolution than a good man’s consoling promise, it could only be given thus conditionally. “I assure you that GOD has forgiven your sins, if you repented and believed, trusting to the merit of CHRIST’S atonement.” But let us now hear Father Benson¹:—

“The ministers of the Church, acting in their Pentecostal power, act with an infallible result. There is a co-operation of the HOLY GHOST with the work of the priest.² The absolution may be rightly or wrongly administered or accepted, but the co-operation of the HOLY GHOST, lifting up the soul out of a state of death into a state of life, is what cannot fail. The gift is given, though a man puts himself into a state of incapacity for receiving it. The ministrations of the Church, the Body of CHRIST, are the real acts of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. And this is sacramental forgiveness.”

This is the real reason why the clergy are bound to offer absolution to those who truly repent. Spiritual consolation is but a secondary benefit, even if desired. Some may not desire it at all, or prefer to seek it for themselves in the written Gospel, in pious books, or through the intercession of saints reigning with CHRIST.³ But when souls have been cut off

¹ Father Benson’s speech at the Fulham Conference; quoted from an article in the *Church Quarterly*.

² Compare S. Ambr. *De Spir. Sancto*, lib. iii. cap. xviii.:—“Videamus utrum peccata donet Spiritus. Sed hic dubitari non potest, cum ipse Dominus dixerit, Accipite Spiritum Sanctum: quorum remisistis peccata, remissa erunt. Ecce quia per Spiritum Sanctum peccata donantur. Homines autem in remissionem peccatorum ministerium suum exhibent, non jus alicujus potestatis exercent. Neque enim in suo, sed in Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti nomine peccata dimittunt. Isti rogant, Divinitas donat: humanum enim obsequium, sed munificentia supernæ est potestas.” Elsewhere, commenting on the prodigal son, S. Ambrose describes how sins are forgiven in the Church before the Eucharistic Feast is made ready, and compares the ring, placed on the prodigal’s hand, to that “Sancti Spiritus signaculum” which would not be wanting to the Church’s pardon.

³ To some minds the Bible is everything, for comfort; others depend much more on a vivid realisation of the communion of saints. The Tyrolese or Italian peasant turns to his patron-saint to help him in every difficulty. Surely one may regard both of these ways as minor helps of great value. The patience of a spirit much tried by affliction, doubt, or

from the unity of CHRIST'S Body by deadly sin, it is right that they should be offered restoration to their lost condition, or, as we may even say, re-creation, by the LORD the life-giver,¹ if any means exists for providing this. And a means does exist, in the Sacrament of Penitence.

Surely we may say, now, without hesitation, the *Sacrament*. Even Luther allowed it that dignity.² Yet, in case any should still be doubtful about this (as Luther was afterwards, because of the uncertainty of the form or outward sign), we will call it, instead, a means of grace of CHRIST'S ordaining; in which, while confession is made with the lips on one side, and a sentence of remission pronounced on the other, there is at the same time present the power of GOD the HOLY GHOST, to quicken and heal the penitent, and to restore him to his place in the Kingdom of Heaven.

This cannot be administered lightly.³ It is the virtue of

suspense, must depend greatly on his having recourse to that "comfort of the Scriptures" in which is our hope. The faith of a dying Christian has been sustained many a time by thoughts of the loving protection of S. Joseph, or the blessed Mother of God. Yet these helps are not supersessors of the Church's sacraments; and the authorised sacramental channels are not merely of pardon for sins, but of comfort for the weary and heavy-laden. Comfort, however, is more widely desired, though it be of less vital necessity than forgiveness; and a larger choice of means is permitted to those who seek it for their own relief.

¹ Compare Bishop Andrewes' *Greek Devotions*:—ἀπὸ τοῦ Πνεύματος τὴν πνοὴν λαβεῖν τῆς χάριτος σωτηρίου.

² See Luther's *Primary Works* (Dean Wace's edition), p. 365. Surely, one may recognise the sacramental character of the penitence ordained by CHRIST, without assenting to the Tridentine anathema against those who say that the sacraments of the new law are "fewer or more than seven." (See Mr. Drury's *Confession and Absolution*, p. 94). Perhaps one may think it most wise to accept the number seven, because that has now for many centuries been approved by the judgment of most of Catholic Christendom; while our own Article xxv. is, at least, patient of interpretation in the same sense. But we might call Penitence a sacrament, and make it the third, with Baptism and Holy Communion; thus, if we chose, keeping ourselves in company with Luther, Melancthon, and the Confession of Augsburg. How many other sacraments there may be besides, is not exactly the point. The three which have been given for the conquest and destruction of sin are Baptism, Penitence, and Holy Communion.

³ "Illis, qui post baptismum se in peccati servitutem et dæmonis potestatem tradiderant, Deus hoc vitæ remedium contulit." (*Concil. Trident.* Sess. xiv. chap. 1).

CHRIST'S Resurrection¹ put forth upon those who have "destroyed themselves"² by a wilful rebellion against GOD. For such, according to the Church's belief from primitive times and throughout the ages, it is the one right and proper way of return. But, whereas the Roman Church makes this not only a sacrament, but of obligation for all her children, we stop short of enforcing, and are perhaps wiser in that we are content to recommend. Its absolute necessity cannot be proved by that text which they adduce, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish;"³ nor do they themselves deny that true contrition suffices to obtain mercy from the all-merciful FATHER. Then, too, how different are the terms of our LORD'S commission in this case, from what He said of the two greatest sacraments! "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of GOD." "Except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His Blood, ye have not life in yourselves." Whereas here it is, only, "If ye should remit the sins of any, they are remitted unto them." There is no use in exaggeration. When every fair exception or modification has been allowed, there still remains a charge from the risen CHRIST, which is to endure through all time: most solemn to those who are its ministers, most holy and blessed to all who receive it in humble faith.

¹ The doctrine of renewal or revival, effected through Absolution by the power of the risen Saviour, is very clearly expressed in our Office for the Visitation of the Sick. Immediately after the form of remission, the priest is instructed to use a collect, the object of which is, of course, to increase the disposition of the penitent to receive benefit from the pardon just pronounced in his favour. Here, then, as one might have expected, is found a petition for the revival of spiritual energies:—"Renew in him, most loving FATHER, whatsoever hath been decayed by the fraud and malice of the devil, or by his own carnal will and frailness."

² Compare Hosea xiii. 9: "It is thy destruction, O Israel, that thou art against Me, against thy help."

³ "Nisi pœnitentiam habueritis" (Vulg.). See the Tridentine Catechism (chap. v. 20). There is nothing here to show that our LORD'S intention was to warn of any but a temporal punishment ("omnes *similiter* peribitis"): so that the text does not seem altogether well chosen. Besides, even if eternal death were threatened, one could hardly say for certain whether He meant to exclude all methods of repentance except that by confession and absolution. For the need of repentance in *some shape*, many other texts might be quoted, as S. Matt. iii. 8-10: xviii. 3; Rom. vi. 15-23. The difficulty is to find one which restricts repentance to the sacramental channel.

The following, from Andrewes' *Sermon on the Power of Absolution*, is appropriate here:—

“As by committing this power GOD doth not deprive or bereave Himself of it, for there is a *Remittuntur* still, and that chief, sovereign, and absolute; so, on the other side, where GOD proceedeth by the Church's act as ordinarily He doth, it being His own ordinance; there, whosoever will be partaker of the Church's act must be partaker of it by the apostles' means; there doth *Remiseritis* concur in his own order and place, and there runneth still a correspondence between both. There have they their parts in this work, and cannot be excluded: no more in this than in the other acts and parts of their function. And to exclude them is, after a sort, to wring the keys out of their hands to whom CHRIST hath given them, to cancel and make void this clause of *Remiseritis*, as if it were no part of the sentence; to account of all this solemn sending and inspiring as if it were an idle and fruitless ceremony; which if it may not be admitted, then sure it is they have their part and concurrence in this work, as in the rest of the ‘ministry of reconciliation.’”

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER VIII.

On the Penitential Teaching of S. Chrysostom.

[Of modern writers on S. Chrysostom, consult Newman's *Historical Sketches*, Dean Stephens' *Life of the Saint*, and the second volume of Bright's *Age of the Fathers*.]

S. CHRYSOSTOM is sometimes quoted, and relied upon in argument, as an authority adverse to sacramental confession. It will be no waste of labour if we devote a short time to the consideration of this question.

There is, probably, not one of the Fathers of the famous fourth century so universally admired as S. Chrysostom. The wonderful charm of his personal character adds to the immense impression created by his writings, so Scriptural, so eloquent, so full of ardent love to God and man. There is much, too, in his books of a kind to make him especially popular with Protestants. Not that his religion has any great affinity with Calvinism. But he is evangelical in the best sense, appealing much to individual responsibility, exhorting to faith and good works, and by no means spending all his strength on sacraments

and ordinances. Added to which, his joyful and hopeful spirit, not depressed by persecution, nor obscured by that hatred and horror of sin which in him were most intense, has rendered this illustrious Father beloved, wherever earnest people can be found, of whatever school, who are striving to "make their calling and election sure" after a saintly fashion.

The best Protestants, however, have tried to claim him for their exclusive property. There they are at fault; for S. Chrysostom is an eminently Catholic writer, and what we find in his books are the things which make up the sum of Catholic belief. No exceptions are to be allowed in his case:¹ he did not use incautious expressions on the Sacred Passion, like S. Hilary, nor, like even the great Augustine, propound a peculiar view of predestination and final perseverance. Thus the attempts made to secure his support for rejection of some Catholic doctrines have not met with conspicuous success. For instance, S. Chrysostom was an enthusiastic venerator of saints and martyrs; which, in itself, would render the supposition most unlikely that he lacked respect for Blessed Mary. What he does say is, that her maternal pride in her Divine SON at first needed His correction,² and that He thus led her up *πρὸς τὸ ὕψος*, to the height that He intended for her. He may have little to tell of the prerogatives of the holy Theotokos, but we should remember that such reserve is common to the Fathers before the Council of Ephesus. As Newman explains, "It would seem as if, till our LORD's glory called for it, it required an effort for the reverent devotion of the Church to speak much about her, or to make her the subject of popular preaching; but when by her manifestation a right faith in her Divine SON was to be secured, then the Church was to be guided in a contrary course."³

Again, a great deal has been said about S. Chrysostom's Eucharistic position; some trying to make him almost a forerunner of Zwinglianism, because, at the end of a most eloquent passage⁴ in which he had spoken of the Church's one holy Sacrifice—which our High Priest offers, and we with Him—he adds, *μᾶλλον δὲ ἀνάμνησιν ἐργαζόμεθα θυσίας*. By this last clause, which some translate, "Or rather, we celebrate a memorial of a sacrifice," he is thought to have contradicted what went before, retracting his assertion that there is a true sacrifice for Christians in the Eucharist. So far from it, S. Chrysostom, by his *μᾶλλον δὲ*, strengthens his previous

¹ His view of the words *σωθήσεται ὡς διὰ πυρός*, and the whole passage, (1 Cor. iii. 10-16), is peculiar, and probably mistaken: yet it does not contravene any Catholic belief.

² S. Chrys. (Hom. xxi. in S. Joann.) He ventures to suggest as possible, that she desired to make herself glorious (*λαμπρότεραν*) through her Divine Son.

³ Newman's *S. Athanasius*, vol. ii., p. 208.

⁴ Hom. xvii. on the Hebrews (chap. x.).

statement: "Nay more, we perform the Memorial of the Sacrifice (of Calvary)." Our Sacrifice (he means), excels the Jewish, not merely by being always one and the same, but because it fulfills the Saviour's command, "Do this for the Memorial of Me." It is His memorial, one with that oblation of Himself, which it commemorates.¹ This is the probable meaning of the passage in question. What is more certain is, that the saint's doctrine of the Holy Eucharist is sacrificial elsewhere,² to such an extent that, if he had intended otherwise in this place, he would have belied the whole tenour of his teaching.

Nor is there anything really exceptional, or un-Catholic, in what he has given to the Church on the subject of penitence.³ To understand S. Chrysostom's doctrine, one should first read his words on Absolution, in the third book *De Sacerdotio*. "What great honour the grace of the Spirit has vouchsafed to priests! since by their agency these [rites] are celebrated, and others, nowise inferior to these, both in respect of our dignity and of our salvation. For men, dwelling on earth, are entrusted with things to be administered in Heaven, and have received an authority which God has not given to angels or archangels. For it has not been said to them, 'Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth,' etc. Those indeed who rule on earth have authority to bind, but only bodies: but this binding [by the priest] touches the soul itself, and transcends the heavens. And what priests do here below, God ratifies above; and the sentence of the servants is confirmed by the Master. For indeed what is it but all manner of power over heavenly things which He has given them, when he says, 'Whose sins ye remit,' etc.? What authority could be greater

¹ The words which stand just before are most explicit:—*ἐκείνην προσφέρομεν καὶ νῦν, τὴν τότε τε προσερχεῖσαν, τὴν ἀνάλωτον*. (It is fair to add, that S. Chrysostom had made no allusion to the Eucharistic Sacrifice in his Homily on the very similar passage, Heb. vii. 23, etc.)

² See, for instance, *De Sacerdot.* iii. 4; and the famous passage in *De Prodit Judæ*, Hom. i. 6:—*Θυσία προσέρχῃ φρικτῇ καὶ ἀγία*. Indeed he constantly speaks in this way, of the "awful sacrifice," or "the sacrifice which angels view with awe;" always referring to that which is offered on the earthly altar. (See his 24th Homily on 1 Corinthians, or third on the Ephesians.)

³ It is curious that, while some make a Protestant of S. Chrysostom, Bishop Sparrow chose him to be his one great authority for the Catholic doctrine. "Is not this Popery? . . . Ask S. Chrysostom, and hear what he saith, in his fifth Homily upon those words of Isaiah, 'I saw the LORD sitting upon a throne . . .'" Words so clear for the judiciary formal Absolution of the Priest, as nothing can be said more plain." (From a Sermon, A.D. 1637, quoted by Pusey, in his *Preface to Gaume's Manual*.) [The words referred to are probably these:—*ὁ κριτὴς ἐν τῇ γῇ κάθηται, ὁ δεσπότης ἐπεται τῷ δούλῳ, καὶ ἅπερ ἂν οὗτος κάτω κρίνει, ταῦτα ἐκεῖνος ἄνω κυροῖ. καὶ μέσος τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τῆς τῶν ἀνθρώπων φύσεως ἕστηκεν ὁ ἱερεὺς, τὰς ἐκεῖθεν τιμὰς κατάγων πρὸς ἡμᾶς, καὶ τὰς παρ' ἡμῶν ἱκετηρίας ἀνάγων ἐκεῖ, ὀργιζόμενον αὐτὸν τῇ κοινῇ καταλλάττων φύσει*. (Hom. v. 1.)

than this? 'The FATHER hath committed all judgment to the SON.' But here I see it all put into the hands of these men, by the SON."

With regard to this passage we should observe, that it agrees entirely with the received doctrine of the Church; that its strong and fervent language shows the subject to have been one on which the saint had very deep conviction; and that it is not an insulated testimony, but may be compared with what he wrote (later, and in the maturity of his power,) when commenting on Isaiah vi., S. Matt. xvi., and S. John xx. Next, let us note that he ascribes to priests the power to execute *judgment*; which could only be if the facts were made known upon which they were to judge. So that this goes to prove, (even more than the natural construction to be placed on his quotations from the upper room,) that he took confession of sins for the preliminary of absolution. (What Jewel put forth against this, in his answers to Harding, is not entitled to much respect. His flippant tone is in itself damaging to the force of his argument.)¹

Yet there is one considerable difficulty as regards S. Chrysostom's intention. What are we to make of his constant habit of urging penitents to speak only to GOD, and not to an audience of their fellow-servants?² The *public* acknowledgment is evidently what he most deprecates, made as it might be before a crowd of hard, unfeeling, and reproachful hearers. That seemed to him like making a "spectacle" of grief which should be sacred, and his tender compassionate spirit revolted from it. The public Homologesis had been useful in its day, but S. Chrysostom was (most likely) against its continuance, both at Antioch, and afterwards at Constantinople.³ Little as he could have had in common with his predecessor in the patriarchate, he probably thought that Nectarius had done right to abolish the penitentiary's office, and a discipline which had been liable to abuse. On the other hand, he had the utmost faith in private prayer, and knew the blessedness of approaching the GOD of mercy by direct supplication. Like S. Augustine, he insisted much on the efficacy of the LORD'S Prayer within the family of GOD, if charity and forgiveness of injuries went with the petition for pardon.

There is no difficulty in all this. But it certainly is strange, that one who had written so earnestly on Absolution, should so seldom allude to confession before the minister of Absolution. One explanation may be, that in those days the custom was for the latter not to be given till after the expiration of a term of penitential exercises; this rule being observed even when no *public* penance was enjoined. So that the Fathers

¹ See Jewel's *Works*, vol. iv. p. 488. Jewel is yet a favourite authority with Evangelical divines much better than himself: and he especially, in his day, distinguished himself by efforts to capture S. Chrysostom.

² See S. Chrysostom's *Works*: *De Incomprehens. Dei Natura*, v. 7: *De Lazaro*, conc. iv. 4: *De Pœnitentia*, Hom. ii. and iv.: *In Hebræos*, Hom. ix. and xxxi.

³ See, however, p. 186, note 2.

mention confession nearly always in connection with the *satisfaction*, which came next; and not with the forgiveness of sins. Then, also, we must take into account the peculiar gifts of this great orator, which inclined him to move his hearers by the most direct appeals,¹ and to urge them to a conversion which could only be the work of their own wills—not of the priest for them. Again, S. Chrysostom addressed himself in preaching, not to souls separated from the Church by grievous falls, but to his ordinary congregation. Nearly everything of this kind that he wrote is contained in Homilies, intended rather for an inner circle of hearers, although outsiders might be present. Having that intention, his omitting the subject of sacramental confession would be quite in accord with what we find in other Fathers, e.g., in the discourses of S. Leo.

But has S. Chrysostom nothing to say about the priest's business with the fallen? Not quite so. For there is, first, in one of his Byzantine Homilies,² a tolerably full answer to the question, What to do for those who have sinned grievously after baptism, and would now repent? In the encouragement which he gives to such, he delights to re-echo the tender love of S. Paul towards the "little children, of whom I am again in travail till CHRIST be formed in you." But he says that they must go to the root and foundation (*πυθμένα*) of the evil that they have done, and, as a first and most necessary step, must make confession of their faults.³ This is excellent, but there is no direct mention of CHRIST's minister: we must search again. Our next quotation shall be from the second of his penitential homilies,⁴ where, though the insistence is on confessing directly to God, he introduces the subject by asking, "Why do not we come day by day to the Church, to embrace penitence?" Still, his meaning is not made perfectly plain. From whose hand is penitence to be accepted? He does not tell us. So too in a Homily on the fourth chapter of S. John,⁵ where he exhorts his hearers to a courageous repentance by the example of the Samaritan woman, we *infer* only—for he never states this clearly—that their trial of courage would be in letting neighbours know that they had been to a priest. But now, on the other hand, Socrates tells how this great man was reproached by the Novatianists, because "Whereas by the Synod of bishops repentance was accepted but once from those who had sinned after baptism, he did not scruple to say,

¹ "He was a preacher whose primary object was to convert souls;" (Dean Stephens, *Life of S. Chrysostom*, p. 422). See also Bright's *Age of the Fathers*, vol. ii. p. 35.

² See S. Chrysostom's 9th Homily on the Hebrews: (on chap. vi. 4-6).

³ Exactly the same advice is given in his Homily against the Cathari.

⁴ S. Chrys. (*De Pœnit.* Hom. ii. 1).

⁵ S. Chrys. (*In S. Joann.* Hom. xxxiv. 3.) He quotes 2 Cor. v. 10, and contrasts that more awful publicity with this. [For the reference, I am indebted to Dr. H. Lea; who, however, explains the passage with great carelessness, and lack of attention to the context. (See his *History of Auricular Confession*, vol. i., p. 180.)]

Approach, though you may have repented a thousand times.”¹ “It is obvious that this “approach” could not have been to the public discipline, for that, of course, would not be repeated without limit (even if it had not been abolished by this time in the Eastern Church:)² obvious, also, that it could not be by secret prayer to God, for that the Novatianists allowed. The approach must have been to S. Chrysostom himself, or to one of his clergy, in an official capacity, but privately. And, in fact, we are told that he was distinctly accused by a certain “Isaac the monk,” of having invited gross offenders to come to him, that he might heal them.³

Yet once again. There is at least one passage in the saint's writings where we find stated, with all desirable clearness, the showing of the soul's wounds on one side, and the priest healing them on the other. The words occur in a Homily on Genesis.⁴ “If he who has done these [wicked things] will resolve to go to confess what he has done, and to show his wound to the physician who heals but does not reproach, and to receive the medicines that he has with him, and to converse with him alone, unknown to any one else, and to tell everything exactly; he will make a quick recovery for himself from his fall. For the physician demands of us nothing grievous or overwhelming; only contrition of heart, compunction of mind, confession of one's error. He not only grants healing of wounds, and shows us cleansed from the sins we had committed, but when a man had before been weighed down with burdens innumerable, he delivers him and makes him righteous.” There can be no misunderstanding a passage like this. The “physician” of the first sentence is proved by the sequel to be no other than a priest with the keys.

On the whole, it is improbable that, in any important question of religious practice, S. Chrysostom would have forsaken the broad stream of Catholic consent for narrow channels and backwaters of his own selection. We are perplexed by the apparent inconsistency of his advice at various times. Yet inconsistency was, in him, the evidence of a large heart, and generous condescension to the weakness of fallen humanity.⁵

¹ Socrates' *History*, book vi. 21.

² There is no absolute certainty whether the public discipline ceased at Constantinople when the Penitentiary's office was abolished. Dr. Bright says (*Age of the Fathers*, vol. i. p. 528), “After the office was suppressed, it was left free to Christians, as before, to open their griefs to any bishop or presbyter whom they might prefer; and if he so directed them, to place themselves publicly in the ranks of penitents.” Anyhow, S. Chrysostom says very little about it, either at Antioch or Constantinople. In his Homilies on the Ephesians, he describes the deacon bidding “those in penitence” to depart before the communion of the faithful, and observes, “All who do not partake [of communion] are in penitence.”

³ See the *Life* in the Venetian Edition, 1734; vol. xiii. p. 147.

⁴ See S. Chrys. (*In Genes. Hom. xx.*: commenting on Gen. iv.).

⁵ May not Jeremy Taylor, possibly, have had a similar motive for his own frequent changes of front?

We understand it best if we remember his strong indignation against the Cathari or purists of his day.* No! he would be "all things to all men," thus "by all means to save some." Those who preferred to come to him by private confession, might do so if they would: others, whom shame forbade to open their grief to any human auditor, should be encouraged to ask pardon of Him "whose mercy is over all His works:" while for a few, perhaps, the kindest course would still be to make them face a public discipline, thus best to quiet their consciences. The inconsistency of S. Chrysostom, after all, was very like the wise toleration of variety in our Book of Common Prayer.

It may be useful to conclude with some short quotations from other Fathers, who have marked a connection between confession and absolution, in sufficiently plain terms:—

(1) S. Cyprian²: "I intreat you, let each confess his offence, now while he who offended is still among the living; while his confession may be accepted; while the satisfaction and remission wrought by the priests are pleasing before the LORD."

(2) S. Ambrose³: "Our LORD gives a very plain command, that the grace of the heavenly sacrament should be poured anew on those who repent with their whole heart and with open confession of their sin, though guilty of some most grievous crimes."

(3) S. Jerome⁴: "The priest offers his Oblation for the layman, lays his hand upon him as he kneels, invokes the HOLY SPIRIT to return to him, and reconciles him." (This is put into the mouth of a Luciferian, yet describes the Catholic practice.)

(4) S. Innocent I.⁵: "It is the priest's part to judge, to attend to the penitent's confession, to order his release when he has made satisfaction."

(5) S. Augustine⁶ says that a man confessing his sins is like Lazarus coming forth into the light still bound: a man absolved by the Church is like Lazarus loosed by the apostles. On the subject of non-sacramental forgiveness, he writes like S. Chrysostom: see his *Ep. cliii. (Ad Macedonium.)*

(6) S. Leo⁷: "CHRIST JESUS, the Mediator between God and man, delivered authority to those set over the Church, that they might give the opportunity of repentance to those who confess, and afterwards, when

* See Dean Stephens' *Life of S. Chrysostom*, p. 235.

² See S. Cyprian (*De Lapsis*, xxix. al. xix.).

³ See S. Ambrose (*De Pœnit.* lib. ii., cap. iii.).

⁴ See S. Jerome (*Contra Lucif.* v. 175).

⁵ S. Innocent I. (*Ep. ad Decent.* cap. vii.).

⁶ S. Augustine (*Serm.* ccclii. 8).

⁷ S. Leo (*Ep. cviii, Ep. clxviii.* chap. ii). By *precator*, S. Leo evidently means him who pronounced absolution; usually the bishop, though described as *sacerdos*.

they were purged by satisfaction, should admit them through the gate of reconciliation to sacramental communion." "It is enough that one should offer his confession first to God, and then also to the priest, who comes forward to say the prayer for those repenting." "It is enough that guilty consciences should be opened to the priests alone, by secret confession."

As to the sequence of the different penitential exercises, and their mutual dependence, the Fathers' testimony has been much cleared of obscurity by researches made in the Roman *Liber Pontificalis*. It is comparatively certain that in the Western Church (except in the earliest period of all), confessions were made to a penitentiary priest, privately. One of these was attached to each principal church, and had charge of both penitents and catechumens. Both remained under his care for a considerable time, and were passed through different orders or grades. (May not the two, possibly, have been amalgamated sometimes? Not, of course, where the worst offences were being expiated, but wherever satisfaction was being made for what S. Cyprian called *peccata minora*?) Then they would be presented to the bishop: the catechumens for baptism, the penitents for absolution—all to be in public, and at the beginning of the Easter Festival. On this theory, which is Mgr. Batiffol's,¹ the paucity of allusions by the Fathers to confession *joined* with absolution would be explained by the fact that the two were not merely separated by intervals of time, but administered by different persons: the confessions being made secretly to the penitentiaries, while the bishops themselves always absolved and in public. (In Chap. v., I thought it possible that private absolution might have been resorted to as an alternative in some cases.)

¹ Batiffol (*Études sur les Origines de la Pénitence*, pp. 146, 147.)

CHAPTER IX.

The Preparation of the Penitent.

THOUGH not, as we believe, in the strictest sense indispensable to the salvation of souls, sacramental penitence is a gift from our risen LORD, to be regarded by His Church with the utmost reverence and thankfulness. Enough has been said to determine its lawful position. The time has now come to consider its use in practice. The next three chapters are to be entirely practical.

Many earnest people will desire for themselves this divinely-appointed means. They will respect the human agency which imparts spiritual renewal through the presence of GOD the HOLY GHOST.¹ What, then, are the dispositions for approaching? How shall priest and penitent alike profit by the ministry of Absolution?

From GOD'S side, the grace is sure, and the message of peace infallible. "For in JESUS CHRIST is the Yea and the Amen, how many soever be the promises of GOD." But, although GOD'S word cannot be broken, the intended benefit may be lost through the fault of the receiver. To those baptised without the love of GOD, says S. Augustine, there is neither remission of sins nor grace of a new birth, until they are converted.² In the Holy Eucharist, "he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, shall be guilty of the Body and Blood of the LORD." And there may be failure in the same way in the use of Penitence. Indeed, the risk is more considerable here

¹ We should not forget that Penitence is, like Confirmation, a *lesser* sacrament, and in one respect inferior to Confirmation, because its obligation is not so universal. Yet if Penitence was of CHRIST'S own institution, comparisons of this sort are almost beside the mark.

² See S. Aug. (*De Bapt. contra Donat.* lib. i. 11, 12).

than in other sacraments, because of the co-operation required of priest with penitent. But in this chapter we shall give our attention only to the latter.

First, however, let there be no misconception of the relation in which that aforesaid risk stands to the duty of reception. The only effect it ought to have is to increase diligence of preparation: most certainly it should not incline any to abandon the idea of coming, or persuade themselves that all the same good may be had without incurring the danger. For by no other means but this can we know that we have access to that operation of the HOLY GHOST, whereby penitent souls are raised from the deadness which remains after sin committed, and restored to vital union with their Saviour. To say that GOD will forgive whether the priest does or no, is to ignore the characteristic blessings attached, not only to this but to all sacraments ordained of CHRIST. For example, there is grave danger in sacrilegious communion; but we do not argue therefore that it will suffice to feed upon CHRIST by faith, without partaking of the holy mysteries.

The one thing on which we should lay the utmost stress is, that it is useless to go in quest of the promised pardon unless we have used all diligence to prepare ourselves. Cranmer, indeed, like others of the "new learning," was averse to any process, or fixed rules, of repentance. "The Scripture taketh Penance for a pure conversion of a sinner in heart and mind from his sins unto GOD." Most true. But how can it follow, that we should abolish contrition, confession, and satisfaction, as Cranmer apparently would have us?¹ Should not these rather be called the proper initial tests of a pure conversion? Surely the wisdom of the ancients is best, in a practical matter like this. Sorrow to begin with. If a man has no deep sense of dissatisfaction with the state to which his sins have reduced him, it were better to leave him bound where he lies:² his captivity is not irksome, and, if you release him, he will soon wish

¹ See Cranmer's *Questions and Answers on the Sacraments* (*Works*, vol. ii.). Bishop Wilson of Sodor and Man has already been quoted in an opposite sense: see notes to Chap. i.

² "Laqueis iniquitatis obstructus," as S. Augustine says (*Ep. cliii.*).

to go back to his prison-house. He will remember his Egypt with too fond regret for any healthful conversion to be expected there. Sorrow, then, first; and next, the confession which proves sincerity; and after that, to make what amends are possible. All the three are presented to view in the person of King David. Sorrow in remembering his ingratitude to the LORD, who had "filled his cup" with the gladness of good success: simple confession of the horrible crime: satisfaction by patience when heavy punishment followed, as his children, either dying themselves, or conspiring to slay their father, caused an accumulation of grief to darken his latter years. This, which gave us the *Miserere*, is the most famous example in history—an example which exhibits in firm outline a repentance such as GOD accepts. True, "the sword should never depart from his house;" for he had given occasion to many to blaspheme. But, yet, David was fully and freely forgiven; and the Divine forgiveness was so declared, as if CHRIST'S own word of Absolution had been anticipated for David's sake. "David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD." "And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin: thou shalt not die." Next to the mercy that looked down from heaven, we may picture to ourselves the joy of that most loyal and faithful seer, in being permitted thus to restore his beloved master; whom he had served, indeed, long and well, but never before with such service as this. But then one reflects, that what was a rare joy in those days is become common now; because the Church's keys are always ready, and the service is rendered every day.

Now, for practical advice:—

Jeremy Taylor is nearly always dependable: so are, equally, some of the best Jesuits, or S. Francis de Sales.¹ Without quoting at length from any, one may try to advise for the most part in such a sense as they would have approved.

I. Contrition. One remembers the tears of Magdalene, or

¹ See Jeremy Taylor's *Guide for the Penitent*, in his *Golden Grove*; or the eighth and tenth chapters of his *Doctrine and Practice of Repentance*. Or consult Bourdaloue, vol. vi. (*Sacrement de Pénitence*); the author of *Manresa, Spiritual Exercises of S. Ignatius*; or S. Francis de Sales (*Devout Life*, chap. xviii.).

of Peter, and how gracious the Saviour was to those first penitents who met His eye. "The woman that was a sinner, and the friend that denied Him, were the first to whom He gave token of His return from the grave, to which their own sins and those of others had consigned Him."¹ The Church is CHRIST'S Body, and must show His own Heart's pity towards the outcast and fallen. Yet Christians are not on that account to be sparing of their grief, if they themselves have fallen from grace. A Christian's disobedience is to be estimated by the height at which he once stood. "All that is Mine is thine." This is one who had put on CHRIST, had received the adoption of sons, had been made a joint-heir with the Heir of all things. Not merely rigorists, therefore, like Tertullian or Novatian, but the Fathers with one consent held, that wilful choice of evil after baptism must exclude from the Kingdom of Heaven. All would agree that, if a Christian who has thus fallen desires readmission, he must, indeed, "water his couch with his tears;" "tears must be his meat day and night." He must recover life, says one,² even "through destruction of the flesh." And they speak thus, while at the same time rejoicing in the abundance of the Divine mercy. They speak thus, although when they comment on the Prodigal's return, they derive from thence a welcome for the penitent, extending even to the Eucharistic Feast.³

Contrition. The only sorrow worthy of a Christian is when one loves the GOD who has been offended, and, in the midst of shame and grief felt on other accounts, cries out with David, "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight." If he finds his heart too hard to weep thus before GOD, then, as S. Ambrose says most beautifully, JESUS Himself will help him. "My eyes have no tears to wash away mine offences: LORD JESUS, do Thou weep for me, as Thou didst for Lazarus, and I shall be saved, and come forth to the light."⁴

¹ From a pamphlet by the late Felicia Skene (*Memoir*, p. 159).

² See S. Pacian (*Ep.* iii. 18).

³ Compare S. Ambrose (*De Pæn.* ii. 3): "Sicut Dominus semel pro omnibus immolatus est, ita quotiescunque peccata donantur, corporis ejus sacramentum sumimus."

⁴ See S. Ambr. (*De Pæn.* ii. 8) and the Supplementary Note to this chapter.

It is the *motive* which distinguishes the perfect from the imperfect sorrow. Most of the ascetic writers say, indeed, that what GOD "will not despise" is a heart *broken*, not bruised merely. But that distinction is of little value: the motive is the thing really important. Not many souls attain at once to sorrow for the love of GOD. Though sincerely sorry, they are influenced at first by dread of disagreeable consequences to themselves, whether here or hereafter. This degree of sorrow has been termed attrition; (though one would say,¹ as before, that there is no great help, nor source of strength, in knowing the name). As to the thing itself, has this "attrition" any value before GOD? Will imperfect sorrow for sin be accepted? Will it not be wholly ineffectual? Is it not a fresh offence in itself, if offered to the All-Holy?

We should almost think that it was, if we could agree with Jeremy Taylor.² This, he says, is "the least and worst part of repentance." "A person who comes to confess his sin because he is scared, may still retain his affections towards it." He is full of scorn for the idea that a soul not fully contrite can be admitted to Absolution. Jeremy Taylor is generally right: but not quite always.

Bull is still more violent. He calls this last doctrine "so dangerous, so damnable, that it seems of itself sufficient to unchristian and unchurch any society of men that shall maintain it."³

But that is hard and unjust. A man of godless habits—of whom it might have been truly said that "all his thoughts are, There is no GOD"—is not capable of full Christian sorrow at the beginning of his conversion. The time is not come for him to weep at JESUS' feet, nor to hate his sin like the author of the fifty-first psalm. One proof of sincerity he is capable of. If he forsakes his sin, he lays a good and solid foundation; if he goes on and confesses it, there is much likelihood that in the act of accusing himself he will receive that grace of contrition which he lacked before. Thus the teaching of the Council of Trent is

¹ I say so here, because the word is, for some reason, most unpopular with Evangelicals.

² See Jeremy Taylor's *Doctr. and Pract. of Rep.*, chap. x. sect. 5.

³ See Bull's *Sermon on Works of Righteousness*, p. 8.

not "dangerous," but eminently wholesome and charitable. "To love GOD above all things," as they teach, "is the highest stage in repentance, and the mark of the perfect contrition of GOD'S children. This stage is not reached immediately by most penitents; but if they honestly forsake their sins and make confession, they are not to be accounted hypocrites, but may receive absolution: their honest confession of itself leading them on to the perfect contrition." *Pœnitens adjutus viam sibi ad justitiam parat.*¹ An imperfect contrition cannot be altogether void of charity, being rather a true gift of GOD and an impulse from the HOLY SPIRIT. And S. Chrysostom says of "fear proceeding from the wrath of GOD," that it is the "mother of tranquility, and foundation of security."²

Nevertheless, this first stage is not for a man to rest in. "Perfect love casteth out fear." They who "shall assure their hearts before GOD, whereinsoever our heart condemn us," are the penitents who "love in deed and truth." (1 S. John iii. 18, 19.)

Contrition, then, is an act of the will, hating and renouncing sin, because GOD is loved. We know too well that that does not always follow, even from the clearest perception of a sin's true nature. When the question is of a familiar fault long indulged, a man may be convinced in argument many times, before he can prevail upon himself to take the decisive step. GOD alone is able to bend the reluctant will. "Turn Thou us unto Thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned."³ And yet the prayers of Christians, "in the body or out of the body," may avail much for the conversion of their brethren. The tradition is constant, that S. Paul ceased to persecute, through the intercession of the martyr Stephen.

But however, there must be an act of the will. The best writers say, also, that a worthy sorrow for sin is proved by rejection of other sorrows. For instance, such things as losses of money, friends, or near relations, will weigh lightly upon a soul penetrated with the desire to mourn only for what has offended

¹ *Concil. Trident.* Sess. xiv. can. iv. See also the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, part II. chap. v. qu. 8.

² See S. Chrys. in Ps. vi. 5:—*ἡ τοιαύτη ταραχὴ γαλήνης μήτηρ ἐστίν. ὁ τοιοῦτος φόβος ἀδείας ὑπόθεσις.*

³ Lament. v. 21.

GOD. The most cruel wounds to self-esteem will scarcely be felt when one considers how he has "crucified the SON of GOD afresh, and put Him to an open shame."¹ In other words, patience and submission under earthly trials are a great part of the penitent's preparation. S. Mary Magdalene had no room to be annoyed by the taunts of the Pharisees.

The next point is, that contrition does not depend on the feelings. That should be reassuring to a people so little sentimental as the English. Although we condemn ourselves in that our tears flow faster for a friend's death than for the evil that we have wrought against GOD, this may be compatible with a "godly sorrow" that is far superior to other griefs. Superior it is, if the solid fruit is greater, which it bears. Pain of bereavement is quickly healed: sorrow for sin produces a long and enduring change of character. Sorrow for sin is not merely emotional, but goes forward with great firmness and force to the forming of holy resolutions. The eyes may be quite dry, tokens of agitation entirely absent; but the indispensable thing—a purpose to amend our ways—will be there. That is the disposition which GOD accepts and blesses.

Resolutions lead one on to speak of self-examination. With the will inclined toward good, the whole man seems to be won; but the memory and understanding have also their necessary share in a Christian's repentance. All the deepest sorrow that good men have felt for personal unworthiness will have proceeded from two causes:—first, the recollection of GOD'S benefits, and then of one's own baseness in making so vile a return for His favours. "Though thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel? and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel. . . . Wherefore, then, didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst that which was evil in the sight of the LORD?" That sort of appeal would make little impression on a man like Saul. But it is very different

¹ Compare S. Chrys. in *Hebr. Hom.* xxxi. 3:—τὸν γὰρ μετανοῦντα οὐκ ὀργίζεσθαι χρή οὐδὲ ἀγριαινεῖν, ἀλλὰ συντρίβεσθαι ὡς κατεγνωσμένος, ὡς οὐκ ἔχοντα παρησίαν, ὡς καταδεδικασμένος, ὡς ἀπὸ ἐλέους σωθῆναι ὀφείλοντα μόνου . . . ὡς μυρίων κολάσεων ἄξιον. Ἐὰν ταῦτα λογίζηται, οὐκ ὀργισθήσεται, οὐκ ἀγανακτήσει, ἀλλὰ πενήθει, κλαύσει, στενάξει καὶ ὀδυρεῖται.

when a humble-minded man remembers the blessings of bygone days. For him, to read the book of memory is the surest way to bring him to his knees, refusing to offer any sacrifice but the broken heart. "The LORD turned and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered . . . and he went out, and wept bitterly."

However, self-examination exercises the understanding as well as the memory. We are not to search our consciences "lightly, and after the manner of dissemblers with GOD." On the contrary, we ask the aid of the HOLY SPIRIT, not merely to remember each and all our past misdoings, but to mark whatever is at the present time most displeasing to GOD, and, therefore, most dangerous to future progress. Then sorrow becomes definite, as we learn precisely what it is which calls for our act of contrition. And resolutions are definite also, bearing, as they always must, on the special sources of danger.¹ The enemy has been forced to show his face: this we owe to self-examination. Henceforth there can be no excuse for "running uncertainly," or fighting "as one that beateth the air." (We shall return to this subject in Chap. xiii.)

All should be done soberly and with prudence, relying throughout on His guidance, who is "quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart." He made these hearts of ours for Himself: He alone can enlighten and turn them, disposing them to truth and righteousness. Yet, Christians are to "bear one another's burdens;" and since the virtue of prudence, so essential for forming resolutions, is always exercised upon an uncertain event;² and as, moreover, a man's

¹ Compare Aristotle (*Eth. Nicom.* lib. vi. 8):—οὐδ' ἐστὶν ἡ φρόνησις τῶν καθόλου μόνον, ἀλλὰ δεῖ καὶ τὰ καθ' ἕκαστα γνωρίζειν. πρακτικὴ γὰρ, ἡ δὲ πρᾶξις περὶ τὰ καθ' ἕκαστα. The largest measure of φρόνησις would be attained by a Christian through self-examination, aided by good spiritual advice.

² Prudence is concerned with choosing the best means to the *summum bonum*, which consists in loving God above all things. (See S. Aug. *De Mor. Eccles.* lib. i. 15.) As this is, to most of us, a remote end (and there are many intervening obstacles) there is room for the office of a spiritual guide, more particularly at the beginning. Of such a one S. Ambrose writes, "Mentis vigore atque auctoritate præstet, . . . exemplo et usu paratior sit, præsentia solvat pericula, prospiciat futura, denuntiet imminientia, . . . paratus sit non solum ad consulendum, sed etiam ad subveniendum." (*De Off. Ministr.* lib. ii. cap. 8.)

heart is "deceitful" at best; there can be nothing but wisdom in availing ourselves of good advice where it may be had, both to know ourselves better, and to resist temptation for the future. The next chapter will be the right place to show how the joint efforts of priest and penitent are often blessed, when the object is to deal firmly with the sins to be renounced at confession. That is still distinct from the ghostly counsel bestowed on pious persons who aim at perfection. Direction, as was said before, has no proper dependence on the ministry of absolution; whereas this is almost an integral part of the soul's loosing.

Contrition, as we saw, is not of necessity emotional. The vivacious Latin or Celtic races are not more likely to furnish salutary examples of repentance, than the grave and silent Anglo-Saxon. Still, emotional language is, on the whole, the Scriptural language, for that sorrow which works conversion. Not to be deeply moved by the thought of what one has done against GOD, is a sort of apathy which agrees better with sloth than amendment of life. If ever tears deserve to be shed, it is for one's own wilful deadly sin. Saints had prayed that that sin might not be. Angels took up arms and would have repulsed the wicked thought. Nay, more, the HOLY SPIRIT pleaded that such a foul disgrace might never come to pass: JESUS gave His life-blood to prevent this spiritual death. If we must be unemotional, let us intreat the LORD that our hearts be not seared and hard. "LORD, I would grieve for love of Thee that I have so often offended Thee."¹

But the too prevalent carelessness makes it expedient that contrition should be followed by an outspoken confession. Nor should there be any difficulty in showing that confession has its proper place in the penitent's preparation.

II. The question is, at this moment, wholly of those seeking "the benefit of absolution" for their own souls, privately.

¹ Compare the beautiful lines beginning, "O JESU CHRIST, if ought there be," by Mr. Caswall, which were formerly numbered 253 in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. On the latest revision, these lines have disappeared; and it is possible that they may be thought more suitable for use in an oratory than "in the Services of the Church." But as a private act of contrition, they are most precious.

Now, if we so seek, we submit ourselves to the judgment of CHRIST'S minister, whether to bind or to loose. Then, surely, the things for which we desire CHRIST'S pardon must not be locked up within our breasts. They must be rehearsed, as S. Leo said, first in the ears of GOD, "then also to His priest." The rule is inflexible, while the practical advantage is beyond dispute.

A confession is the joint offering of priest and penitent. In the next chapter the turn will come for pointing out ways by which the former may assist the latter. At present, let us rather insist that the person confessing is bound to do his utmost to enable the confessor to use the keys well and wisely on his behalf. This is nearly always indispensable. Contrition may sometimes be evident without confession. But there is generally great risk in so absolving—too great to be run except very rarely, and *in extremis*.¹ (Ancient Canons show that absolution was sometimes allowed to those who had lost the use of speech, but only if their previous desire had been attested by relatives.)²

Confessions should, therefore, furnish information. What S. Francis de Sales wrote against vagueness of speech is still deserving of attention:—"Do not make only those superfluous accusations, which some make as a matter of course: 'I have not loved GOD as I ought, I have not prayed with so much devotion as I ought, I have not loved my neighbour as I ought, I have not received the sacraments with so great reverence as I ought;' for in saying this you will say nothing

¹ Charles II. is said to have received absolution on his death-bed, without confession, first from Ken, and afterwards from the Benedictine Huddleston.

² The Canons of Carthage, A.D. 398, are generally supposed ancient, though it is doubtful whether they were enacted in that year, and by a Synod. Among these, the 76th is as follows:—"If a sick person desires penance, but on the arrival of the priest can no longer speak, or has lost his understanding, then those who heard his wish shall testify to it, and he shall receive the penance. If it is thought that he is about to die, he shall be reconciled through imposition of hands, and the Holy Eucharist shall be given to him. If he lives, the witnesses before mentioned shall assure him that his wish has been fulfilled, and he must be placed under the penitential discipline for as long as the priest thinks good." (Hefele, vol. ii. E.T. p. 416.)

definite which can make your confessor understand the state of your conscience; since every saint in heaven, and every man on earth might say the same things, if they were to come to confession."¹ On the contrary, it has been advised that divers sins should be owned one by one, and called by their right names; and that, as far as possible, the number of times of sinning should be specified in each case. Before GOD, indeed, the memory's tribute would be too carelessly rendered without this; because the same fault committed seven times amounts to seven separate offences, as surely as if we had been guilty of each of the *septem mortalia*. But it is also almost necessary in respect of the confessor, that he may judge how far any evil has become habitual, and what is the strength of its hold. Another rule is to mention the circumstances which produced a wicked action: sometimes, too, the person against whom it was done. David's guilt was enhanced both by the reputation of Uriah, one of his bravest men, and because he slew him "with the sword of the children of Ammon." These things give a particular complexion to a crime, so that a priest cannot well judge without knowing more than the bare fact.²

Yet too much caution cannot be used in keeping to the straight path: not to be discursive, and on no account to tell tales of others. [Jeremy Taylor (quoted in the Appendix to Chap. vii.) is excellent here.] Above all, even while explaining oneself somewhat for the priest's sake, to remember the Divine majesty, and speak ever into the ears of GOD. "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned."

"Thou [O LORD] hast known my reproof, my shame, and my dishonour." If one human being knows besides, he knows only as he is set "in the person of CHRIST."

While most writers concur to a large extent in what they advise, there has been much disagreement over the question whether *all* faults, that are remembered, should be acknowledged,

¹ See S. Francis de Sales (*Devout Life*, chap. xviii.).

² See Jeremy Taylor (*Doctr. and Pract. of Rep.* chap. x. sect. 8): "If the penitent person hath been an habitual sinner, he is to take care in his confessions that the minister of religion understand the degrees . . . the time of his abode in sin, the greatness of his desires, the frequency of his acting."

*the less with the greater.*¹ Absolution is required only for the greater, and although pious people are averse to considering any fault of theirs as trifling, yet, after long practice in self-examination under the invocation of the HOLY SPIRIT, they surely ought to have some power of discrimination. This is a difficult point to decide. On the one hand are those real dangers which beset the over-scrupulous conscience; on the other, the importance of preserving that lowly estimate of self which would accept the full measure of blame for shortcomings. It should also be remembered (on the same side of the question), that beginners are hardly to be trusted to use discrimination. The more deeply touched and humiliated a man may be at his first conversion, the more likely it is that he will fix his attention on a single fault, of late occurrence, which looks to him like a *monstrum horrendum*, covering the whole horizon.² Nothing is usually more difficult to such a person than to realise that he owes a debt for other things, done long ago and banished from memory. And yet the later transgression might not have been without the earlier; and the priest should know of both, before he can take the measure of the repentance—even if he could forget what is due to Almighty GOD. For beginners, therefore, it seems best that they should acknowledge everything. But whether the same rule ought to apply to those more experienced, is a little doubtful. So, too, as regards frequency of confession, there may be excess as well as defect. Although our English Prayer Book has determined nothing on the subject, its tone may be taken as in favour of long intervals between the times of coming. Its language does not sound quite in accord with a rule of confession before each communion, nor with making the first confession at eight years old. This work must be done fully and carefully whenever it is done: whether it should be done very often,

¹ The Council of Trent advises, yet does not insist:—"Venialia, quamquam recte et utiliter dicantur, taceri autem citra culpam possunt."

² Giving up a single fault, however, *may* be the critical decision, by which the whole heart is surrendered to GOD. Thus Canon T. T. Carter says, alluding to S. John xiii. 10:—"The real cleansing of one part of our being is the cleansing of the whole. Having the feet washed by CHRIST, was to be 'clean every whit.'"

is not so certain. The matter of very frequent confessions will be, for the most part, "holy desires," tending to "good counsels" and "just works." However truthfully and humbly breathed, these will not have in them the malice of deadly sin. If a priest receives them, he must be careful not to number such penitents among those who have "erred and strayed from GOD's ways like lost sheep."

III. There is a third and last stage of preparation. A sincere penitent is moved to declare his sorrow before GOD by coming to the tribunal which CHRIST founded for His Church. He makes his confession, and in so doing is filled with a more lively grief for having grieved the good GOD by disobedience. The state of his soul has been honestly disclosed, and CHRIST'S minister judges him fit to receive the grace of Absolution. This sets him free, and restores him to his place in the Divine family. Whatever he had forfeited by his fall is his again, now he is forgiven. He is "justified by faith, has peace with GOD through our LORD JESUS CHRIST, and rejoices in hope of the glory of GOD." This is the heritage of the baptised, "the liberty of the glory of the children of GOD."

Still, however, there remains the question of satisfaction. This makes no inroad on spiritual liberty. It is not, properly, the "binding" of which our Saviour spoke.¹ Those souls only are bound, who are left, of their own will, in a self-chosen bondage to sins which they will not forsake. Of that there is no question now. But we trace satisfaction, first, as an event in the order of Divine Providence: as that which was ordained for fallen man at the beginning, with the words, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." It is evident, indeed, without reference to moral theology, that, while the eternal consequences of sins are done away by the repentance

¹ The Council of Trent, nevertheless, ruled (*Sess. xiv. Can. 8*) that the priest does "bind" when he chastises sins by imposing satisfactory penance. "*Nam claves sacerdotum non ad solvendum duntaxat, sed ad ligandum concessas, etiam antiqui Patres et credunt et docent.*" This is not quite convincing. The priest may bind, so long as a penitent remains unshriven; but surely his discretion is at an end when he has pronounced absolution? Probably, however, the "binding" intended by the Council is *disciplinary*; (see p. 170.) It could not be sacramental.

which appeases the Almighty, some temporal consequences remain still to be endured.¹ As Adam himself must experience symptoms of mortal decay in the frame in which he had transgressed, and the hands which had taken of the forbidden fruit; so we see to this day "the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain," as the Apostle says. That is so, with only the *peccatum originis* to account for it. But much more, if we choose our instances from some of the actual present sins and scandals. For example, sometimes the stigma of an old crime remains, to hinder the kindly intentions of an entirely willing heart. Sometimes, where a wife has been injured by a husband's unfaithfulness, it is found impossible to restore domestic concord. Sometimes nature itself seems to resent the excesses of youth, and the result is a constitution permanently enfeebled. Not unfrequently, a man who has once been weak suffers from weakness of judgment all his life, as David did.² And one more consequence—nearly universal after sinful indulgence—is, that we are prone to yield to temptation, the same, or even of a different kind from what overcame us at the beginning. We may never again be quite morally firm.

Now such things as these are made the material of satisfaction for those who truly repent. Many a time the best amends that can be made are by meekly bearing a loss of good for so long as GOD wills. But there are also cases in which one may go to meet the loss half-way, victoriously, as Zacchæus did. If Zacchæus had simply become a reformed character, through our LORD'S visit to his house, he might perhaps have been saved, and it is likely that he would have had some bitter sneers to put up with, even so. But that did not content him. He must make a nobler satisfaction. "Behold, LORD, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have wrongfully exacted ought of any man, I restore four-fold." After that, there might still be very many who would remember

¹ There are some excellent remarks on this in Dr. Dale's *Lectures on the Ephesians*, pp. 57, 58.

² The following seem to be instances of a weak judgment in David, in the exercise of government, after his fall:—2 Sam. xix. 13 and 29: 2 Sam. xxiv. 2: 1 Kings ii. 8, 9.

his cheating, and cast out his name as evil; but he had done what he could. And I believe that many in our own day, and in this country, would be ready to do as much.

This, too, is, probably, the best and most natural course, under the altered circumstances of modern society. Either the discipline of affliction is sent, or we take punishment to ourselves by voluntary choice. Either way, we are scholars in a most useful school, and able soon to acknowledge, with the Psalmist, "It is good for me that I have been in trouble." Those upon whom GOD'S hand is laid in chastisement, learn either "to be abased" or "to abound," and dispose themselves, now to quietness and silence, or now, again, to some courageous effort of restitution. In that spirit one can fancy S. Paul, patient under misrepresentation from his countrymen, or yielding his body to the stones at Lystra, or glorying in the Cross of JESUS whom he had persecuted. But we hardly discover a saint in whom these ideas were not prominent, viz., willingness to suffer, a desire to expose oneself to loss for GOD and the brethren, and a penitential spirit resolutely cherished.

It is obvious that we could not return to rules of satisfaction after the methods of the old ecclesiastical discipline. In early times, and in the Middle Ages, penal and coercive jurisdiction was exercised, either directly or indirectly, by Christian bishops.¹ That, of course, could not be done now, and there is every reason to expect that it never will again. The rulers of the Church have no power by law to inflict temporal punishments.

Yet even now we are familiar with the idea that offenders should be restored on condition of their promising to make some reparation for their offence. That scarcely differs at all from the Church's doctrine, that absolution necessitates the performance of what is called a penance. Let us try to

¹ See the charges brought against Basil of Ancyra, in Socrates' *History*, book ii. chap. xlii. Also Martene, *De Ritibus*, lib. i. p. 2. art 6. Mr. Barmby, in the *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, shows that S. Gregory the Great was not averse to punishing severely, in cases of stubborn heresy. In one of his Letters he orders idolaters, if slaves, to be beaten; if freemen, to be imprisoned. "Cruciatu saltem eos corporis ad desideratam mentis valeat reducere sanitatem." (S. Greg. *Ep.* ix. 65.) The slaves would be those employed on his own estates.

understand the principle of this, and whether it is worth preserving.

There are, at least, two ideas, long and widely accepted, which it perpetuates. First, that there should be correspondence between guilt and punishment. Secondly, that rules of amendment should be made under submission to a spiritual guide. The adaptation of penalties was very carefully considered of old: see, for instance, the Canons of Ancyra (somewhat pitiless),¹ the Canons of S. Peter of Alexandria, the Canons of Nicæa, and those written by S. Basil and forwarded to S. Amphilochius.² According to what their offence had been, penitents were then placed for a stated period among the "Mourners," the "Hearers," the "Kneelers," or those who were allowed to "stand with" the faithful, but excluded from the Oblation.³ And the rule of the Roman Church is still, that satisfactions should be enjoined at the time of confession, *pro qualitate criminum et pœnitentium facultate*. There is no thought of making punishments really equivalent to sins;⁴ but, since the justice of GOD has decreed that certain consequences should accrue from certain transgressions of His holy law, the Church exhorts her children not merely to practice submission, but even willingly to inflict pain upon themselves, that so His wrath may be sooner averted, and a curse transformed into a blessing.

"Consider," says the author of *The Spiritual Combat*, "that if you have brought upon yourself the evil under which you are suffering, you deserve to bear it; for, in such a case, every rule of justice requires you to bear patiently the punishment which you yourself were the means of

¹ See Hefele's *History of Councils*, E.T., vol. i. 199. (The Alexandrian Canons were milder than those of Asia.)

² S. Amphilochius was Bishop of Iconium from A.D. 374 to about 395. Another reference might be given here, to an important Canon of S. Gregory of Nyssa, quoted in *The Greek Catechism of Nicholas Bulgaris* (17th cent.); to the effect that "attention should be paid to forming the character of the penitent: not to the period during which he should be punished."

³ δύο δὲ ἔτη χωρὶς προσφορᾶς (11th Canon of Nicæa).

⁴ Rev. xviii. 7 has been quoted sometimes in favour of equivalence: but how can man mete with a measure known only to God? (Wis. xi. 20.)

inflicting. Or, if you are not to blame . . . think that there are many other faults of yours for which you have received no chastisement from GOD. . . . And seeing that the Divine mercy has changed the punishment . . . into this light affliction, ought you not to receive it willingly, or even thankfully? If the penance is a long one . . . you must remember that only through the strait gate of tribulation can one enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. And if it were possible to enter by an easier way, the law of love would not allow you, seeing that the SON of GOD, with all His friends and His members, reached that kingdom by a road strewn with thorns.”¹

But is there any advantage in having the measure of the satisfaction fixed and determined by the priest who has heard the confession? Only, if at all, with considerable limitation. For surely it is best, and agrees most with a responsibility which only timorous souls would evade, that we should make up our own minds as to the amends which we desire to offer.² A priest may very well impose some particular devotion as a reminder of particular sins; or he may commend abstinence from certain pleasures for precaution's sake: but these would hardly deserve to be called satisfaction. Any considerable sacrifice is best and most sincere, when prompted by a man's own conscience: if he lags behind, there is little use in another's driving him to what he dislikes. He might, indeed, be wise to consult a clergyman of experience before he forms his resolution; but we must remember that that is not an essential part of sacramental penitence. The priest's office ends when, from the confession heard, he has formed his judgment on the state of the soul before him, and, according to what that judgment may be, has either remitted or retained the sins.

¹ *The Spiritual Combat*, chap. xiv.

² See Jeremy Taylor (*Doctr. and Pract. of Repentance*, chap. x. sect. 6):—“Sin must be confessed, and it must be left. . . . We have no liberty or choice but in the exercise of the penal or punitive part of repentance: but in that, every man is left to himself, and hath no necessity upon him, unless where he hath first submitted to a spiritual guide, or is noted publicly by the Church.”

The only thing to be added is this :—

We saw the terrible danger of self-deceit, by which contrition evaporates in sentiment, and confession becomes a mocking of GOD. Then, may not one deceive himself afterwards, even in making satisfaction? Perhaps the danger of undue softness is not great, where sorrow for sin has been true and deep. Less, indeed, when one decides for himself, than when he gives himself to another to settle everything for him. But we must not forget that an opposite extreme is also possible. Is it an unheard of thing, that people exclude themselves from earthly joys, in a way to distress their best friends, if it does not also grieve the Spirit of "love and joy and peace?" So the priest's intervention may be useful in some cases to prevent rash ventures in self-discipline. His part will then be to require that the penitent should think soberly, and act discreetly—a part in which he will have S. Paul with him, and should not be denied the best wishes of all good Christians.

Here, however, we may do well to pause. We might easily be led on now to a very difficult subject, namely, the granting of indulgences. That will demand for itself a small space in the next chapter. But for the present let us hold our ground, and insist on reasonable *independence* for the penitent. A priest may prudently require some assurances for the future. He may impose "penances," to aid recollection of perils escaped and temptations likely to return. But the two essential things are only contrition and confession; and these are sufficient for obtaining the grace of Absolution.

It would be mere vanity to quarrel with terms of good standing in Catholic literature.¹ Satisfaction has consequently been retained, although to most of us it may have a sound disappointing and ambiguous. To suppose that we could really satisfy the Divine justice by punishing ourselves in this life, would be a doctrine of merit, grateful, possibly, to the new optimism of the day, which reckons all things achievable by the strenuous and stout-hearted. But certainly it would not

¹ The Greek Church has allowed *ικανοποίησις* to be ancient and Catholic (e.g., at the Synod of Jerusalem, A.D. 1672).

be Christian doctrine. When the Great King "makes a reckoning with His servants," the servants cannot stand on equal terms with their LORD. We know of one price alone given to pay every debt—the precious Blood of CHRIST. However, the use of this word is capable of explanation. "Catholics," says Bossuet, "teach unanimously that only JESUS CHRIST, who is both GOD and Man, was capable, through the infinite dignity of His person, of offering to GOD sufficient satisfaction for our sins. But He was able to apply this satisfaction in two ways: either by granting entire remission without any penalty remaining (as He does in baptism), or by commuting eternal into temporal punishment (as He does for those who fall back into sin after baptism). From this we must not infer that JESUS CHRIST has failed to make entire satisfaction for us; but that, on the contrary, having acquired an absolute right over us by the infinite price He has offered for our salvation, He grants us pardon on the conditions, under the laws, and with the reserves which seem good to Him. . . . We should not marvel that He, who showed Himself so merciful to us in baptism, should display greater severity when once we have broken our holy promises."¹

There is nothing to object to in this explanation. But may we not content ourselves with simply setting side by side the two following statements?

The first is from our Prayer Book:—"CHRIST made on the Cross, by His one oblation of Himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world."

"The second is from Hebrews xii.:—"He chasteneth us for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness." When S. Paul's Corinthian converts met such chastisement with a godly sorrow of their own—a sorrow with indignation, and fear, and zeal, and longing, and avenging—the apostle rejoiced over them, because he saw that their sorrow would bring no regret.

¹ From Bossuet's *Exposition de la Foi Catholique*, viii.; quoted by Addis and Arnold in their [Roman] *Catholic Dictionary*.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE, ON CONTRITION.

THE idea that we may supply our defect of sorrow from the merits of the tears of JESUS CHRIST, quoted above from S. Ambrose, occurs also in Bishop Andrewes' *Sermon* on Rom. viii. 26 :—

"If the spirit that quails in us do quail also in the whole Chnrch, yet we have a supply from the tears which our Head, CHRIST, shed on His Church, and from 'the strong cries' which He uttered to GOD His FATHER 'in the days of His flesh,' by which He ceaseth not to make request to GOD still for us; so that albeit the hardness of our heart be such as we cannot pray for ourselves nor the Church for us, yet we may say *Conqueror Tibi, Domine, lachrymis Jesu Christi.*"

As to the question of a reparation *equivalent* to the offence, it is curious to compare the following lines from *A Winter's Tale* (Act v. sc. 1). The faithful courtier says to his broken-hearted master :—

"Sir, you have done enough, and have perform'd
A saint-like sorrow; no fault could you make
Which you have not redeem'd: indeed, paid down
More penitence than done trespass: at the last
Do as the Heavens have done; forget your evil;
With them, forgive yourself."

Anyone can see that what speaks here is a spirit of kind *indulgence*, moved by the truest loyalty and deep compassion (with some slight mixture of another motive). There is much that is beautiful in that picture.

But the saints were not soon weary of the tasks of penitence: they did not spare themselves. Of course, the scope of this book does not allow one to introduce selections from their devotions, which have been preserved. But there are still earnest Christians who will value such a manual as *The Paradise of the Christian Soul*, which Dr. Pusey gave to the English Church so long ago as 1847. And in the third part of the *Paradise* will be found prayers, acts of contrition, and thoughts on confession, fit to form the best of sequels to this chapter on the Penitent's Preparation. (Those who object to prayers taken from a foreign source, may find what will suit them in Ken's *Practice of Divine Love*, part I.)

CHAPTER X.

The Preparation of the Minister.

LET us first fix bounds to the priest's ruling of individual consciences. I am speaking now of ministering Absolution to souls sincerely penitent for sins which have debarred them from communion. These are not to be encouraged to submit their choice, in faith and morals, for an indefinite period, to the priest who heard their confession. Nor can he assume the control of life's journey with them, steering their way through all the rocks and shoals. There may be a higher kind of direction for souls aiming at perfection. *They* may gain much by asking advice from time to time, either of a clergyman or of some prudent Christian neighbour: this, if not carried to excess, is to be considered as included in the "bearing one another's burdens, and so fulfilling the law of CHRIST." But where there are serious temptations which still beset the penitent, he must make up his mind soon to face the familiar fiend for himself. Else he will never "add to his faith virtue."

After that, we shall consider the great responsibility which the priest has, nevertheless, in his ministering of absolution, and in the immediate consequences thereof to the penitent; and think what will be his best preparation for a due exercise of his office.

I. The subject of Satisfaction, very slightly handled in the third section of Chap. ix., bears on the general question of moral and spiritual improvement. We all know that there must be improvement: "not already made perfect, I press on." We know equally, that our progress will be resisted: "we wrestle with the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." But we know one thing more. The servant of GOD shapes his

course with strict "circumspection," because he has to redeem time that was misspent through his own neglect. The discipline of his life depends much on what his past has been. He has to turn long-standing hindrances into present helps; and this is a task full of difficulty.

A very natural thought is, therefore, that he should look out for wise counsellors to guide him. Yet an abundance of human counsel is neither necessary, nor expedient, for a soul's continuance in the safe path. If S. John of the Cross says, "Those who perform penances contrary to obedience are more likely to make progress in vice than in virtue,"¹ we must remember that he has in his mind religious vows, and that the penances which he condemns would be both extravagant in themselves, and opposed to the wise rule which he admires. He can hardly have intended to preclude all independent thinking upon one's own private spiritual matters. In point of fact, we soon reach the limit of good that most priests can do by their tutelage. No director can carry on his supremacy so as to be wholesome, through the months and years that another's probation may last. Nor can the other shift his burden from his own shoulders to the priest's. Henry II.'s ferocious temper was sometimes disarmed, but never subdued, by the combined firmness and gentleness of S. Hugh. In the long run, every man must reap as he sowed: and trust in GOD must bring him victory, if he is to prevail at all. A priest may indeed be blamed if he is not urgent at the proper time—if, like a careless bishop ordaining, he has "partaken in other men's sins" by receiving one of whose contrition he was not assured. And some confessions require to be tested by promises of the most definite kind. For instance, to pay debts, to forgive injuries, to break off a sinful intrigue. But when S. Ambrose had once obtained a more merciful law from Theodosius, he did not pursue his penitent with farther encroachments upon his royal discretion.

However, a priest's claim to obedience might be, and has often been, stretched much farther. It can be pushed so as to interfere not merely with individual liberty, but with the most necessary relations in which men are placed one with another. Or again,

¹ From Pusey's translation of Gaume, p. 231.

instead of "binding heavy burdens and grievous to be borne," a priest may run into the opposite extreme, and encourage all sorts of laxness. This is really the chief danger. In no part of the Catholic Church would confessors be very likely to order wholesale renunciation of worldly goods, or that one should go abroad and become a missionary, or nurse fever-cases, or renounce home-ties and enter the religious life. Such sacrifices have sometimes been actuated by the sorrow or the thankfulness of souls forgiven, but they have generally been spontaneous. The harm of most priestly direction lies in its tendency to laxness. A mere human pity, then, shuts out that severer view of Christian service, which is alone consistent with true charity. This is increased by the familiar social intercourse which takes place at other times between the two. Too soon the once courageous penitent becomes filled with a timid self-consciousness, a desire on all occasions to bargain for a lighter cross, a "form of godliness," but with virtual denial of "the power thereof." One cannot speak too strongly in deprecation of what may produce results like these.

At the same time one cannot deny that there is much truth both in the doctrine of indulgences, if rightly considered, and in that of transference of merit. For, first, we are all in favour of some indulgence to those who deserve punishment; ourselves, certainly, not excepted. Charity could not do its part without that. "The quality of mercy is not strain'd." To exact the full penalty in every case might be more cruel than the rack-renting of some miserably impoverished farm by a greedy Irish landlord. And there is absolute necessity for conceding something to human weakness. People may be very sorry for their sins, who yet are incapable of rigid fasting; or who, for various reasons, could not well forego the pleasures of innocent society. Like Jacob's flocks, "they will die if you overdrive them." There is no help for it therefore: they must be indulged. And here, too, one would think, if anywhere, there is room for the director to give his assistance. Even if he is easy-going, one may better trust him than one's own slothful heart. He would be more likely to remind us of what is the counterpart of an indulgence—that if we are "spared"¹ for the moment in this or that, the

¹ See 1 Cor. vii. 28.

concession must always be joined with earnest aim and prayer, that we may attain ere long to a higher and purer standard.

Then, as to transference of merit. Surely it is a beautiful thought that, in that great mystical union of souls, in which death causes no breach (as Bishop Pearson says¹), "the strong should bear the infirmities of the weak," in whatever way GOD may permit. How much more must not GOD'S glory require, than we, for the most part, are content or even able to offer! Is there not, then, some comfort in the reflection, that around His Throne are some whose love is purer and bolder than ours—angels who always do Him service in heaven, saints who "fill up that which is lacking of the afflictions of CHRIST in their flesh?" And is it not true of these latter, according to the sweet Pauline teaching, that their service, in which GOD delights, is "for the Body's sake, which is the Church," and that they "rejoice in their sufferings for our sake?" That, surely, is what the doctrine of transference of merit really means—or ought to mean. Like their Blessed Master, the saints would enrich us by their poverty—poverty in this world, riches in the world to come.²

The present writer has very little knowledge of the working of the system of indulgences in the modern Roman Church. But Dr. H. C. Lea devotes a whole huge volume to an indictment of Rome for the easy terms on which her "pardons" are issued;³ and perhaps others, less prejudiced than Dr. Lea, may agree with him to some extent (though the standard of morals is probably quite as high in that communion as elsewhere). It is very possible that Rome, while insisting on the obedience of

¹ Pearson on the Creed, Art. "Communion of Saints."

² This is supposed by some to be opposed to the absolute equality of all believers, wrought through the substitution of CHRIST'S righteousness for their own. But where the assistance of holy persons is thus repudiated, and each soul is to exist in spiritual insulation, may there not be a possible danger of errors on the future state like those of Origen? A man lives and dies without the well-founded confidence of a child of God. Yet he has not been a great sinner, and perhaps is not utterly lost: but none of his brethren have helped, or can help him at all. Shall we think, then, that he is destined to be improved after death by a separate penal purification, through a series of new existences? (See Bishop Westcott's "Origenes," in *Dict. of Chr. Biography*.)

³ See Dr. Lea's *Auricular Confession*, etc., vol. iii.

her children, has laid herself open to the charge of compounding for obedience by laxness of requirement—to her penitents, in particular, promising the utmost mildness, if they will let the whole business of their satisfaction be settled for them by the priest. Nor can one assent without considerable hesitation to the following definition :—“ An indulgence is a remission valid in the court of conscience and before GOD, made by application of the treasure of the Church on the part of a lawful superior.”¹ That sounds like a very large extension of priestly power, to which the English Church certainly makes no claim on behalf of her clergy. S. Gregory indeed desired that the clergy should show an almost maternal tenderness towards those who sought their counsel ;² and there must be countless instances in which persons, who trusted to that, have led well-regulated lives, passing safely over “the waves of this troublesome world.” But the better rule surely is that of the apostle :—“ Work out your own salvation ” (though “ with fear and trembling ”), “ for it is GOD which worketh in us both to will and to work, for His good pleasure.”

However, while the caution just offered cannot be called unnecessary, it does not apply in the same degree to a priest's *first* counsels to his penitents. Souls do need wise and wholesome words to help them at the outset. So far as first steps are concerned, every confessor has the right to advise, after and beyond his conveyance of GOD'S pardon by Absolution. But if he is still consulted after the beginning, he should not treat his confidant too much as an invalid, nor refer back too often in his own mind to the substance of the confession, which he should rather forget, as GOD forgets. There will, of course, be exceptional cases. Some persons are grievously hindered by the recurrence of old temptations. It is not so much their own proneness to yield, that causes trouble, as the inevitable difficulty of their situation in the world. Their way seems to lie through Dante's forest, wild, rough, and tangled, and haunted by wild beasts. If so, they may need for a good while longer

¹ See Addis and Arnold's *Cath. Dict.* Art. “ Indulgence.”

² “ Ad pastoris mentem quasi ad matris sinum recurrant.” (S. Greg. *Reg. Past.* ii. 5.)

the protection of the one earthly guide who knows them best. Then, says Canon T. T. Carter, "Confession does not weaken the soul, if the habit is arising from a felt need. It helps weak souls that would otherwise be weak. The things which really weaken are oppression and temptation. There is more weakness from going on under a burden, or with perplexities or violent temptations, than there is in removing them by opening the grief of the soul, by sympathy and by renewed pardon and grace of GOD."¹ The question, with us, was not so much of confession, as of amendment; but Mr. Carter evidently means that there are some people whose confessions will always be accompanied by a demand for sympathetic counsel, which their feebleness requires to have often repeated. But these cases are exceptional.²

II. Let us now pass on to the question of training for the ministry of Absolution. Before, in Chapter viii., an objection was quoted from Jeremy Taylor, not altogether consistent with his teaching in general:—"If the sinner be not penitent, the priest cannot pardon him; if he be penitent, GOD will pardon him, whether the priest does or no." The second half of this objection misses the point; which is that, whether pardon can be had without it or not, absolution is a special means of grace for recovering souls by a spiritual revival; and we have no right to assume that GOD will grant the same healthful renewing to those who neglect His sacrament. But let us look now at the *first* of Jeremy Taylor's propositions. "If the sinner be not penitent, the priest cannot pardon him." Most manifestly true: But what then? One must suppose the objection to mean something like this—that, in many cases, the priest will *pretend* to pronounce pardon, nevertheless; and that the cause of his failure will be his inability to read the human heart.

Now, this part of the objection cannot be set aside quite so

¹ *Life and Letters of T. T. Carter*, p. 233.

² Jeremy Taylor says, "He that is troubled with scruples ought to rely upon the judgment of a prudent guide." To do so, he says, shows a "humility of understanding," which God will bless. Yet the over-scrupulous, at least, are not always humble-minded. Very often they are noted for a restless curiosity about themselves, and are as impracticable as those whom S. Paul describes in 2 Tim. iii. 7.

easily as the other. The efficacy of the sacrament, in each particular case, does depend on the priest as well as the penitent. If the latter be duly prepared, the former *may* judge him unfit: or again, as Jeremy Taylor says, though the person confessing be not contrite, the priest may imagine that he is; and, whichever way, the sinner goes back unshriven—the ministry of absolution has failed. One may ask, How can this be? when our LORD so plainly said, “*Whatsoever* ye shall bind, or loose, shall be bound, or loosed, in heaven.” The answer is that He also declared, and with equal plainness, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, If ye shall ask anything of the FATHER, He will give it you in My Name.” But, as that promise did not preclude the failure of petitions that were not according to His will, so neither did this forbid ill success to the priest who uses the keys without discretion. The thing that cannot fail is the attachment of the grace to the Sacrament. That is always unchangeable, and CHRIST will ratify what is done on earth in His Name: but not if the priest judges amiss.¹

Yet one would venture to say that this risk, deeply serious though it is, must be met in the fulness of Christian hope. Surely, those who assume that ignorance is to be the rule, not the exception, with confessors, forget what the power really is, which our LORD committed to His apostles. They forget that the original breathing of the HOLY GHOST by the risen CHRIST was on the ministers of this grace: not till afterwards, and then through their instrumentality, on the absolved. Nothing can be more evident than His intention to qualify the apostles for a difficult and responsible office by a very glorious gift of enlightenment. That is the great source of confidence. A clergyman who hears confessions puts himself into the hands of His Divine Master, assured that his mental faculties will not be left to “sleep in death,” but will receive that quickening, and that ordering, which are requisite for the work in hand.

Then, as we should also well remember, the confessor’s

¹ S. Gregory the Great says (*Hom. in Evang.* lib. ii. 26), “Plerumque contingit, ut hic iudicii locum teneat, cui ad locum vita minime concordat. . . . Fit, ut ipsa hac ligandi et solvendi potestate se privet, . . . ut vel damnet immeritos, vel alios ipse ligatus solvat” (referring to Ezekiel xiii. 19).

insight is demanded merely for that decision, which he is to make, on the *sincerity of a soul's repentance*. He is not expected—nay he is forbidden—to make a study of all the traits of character for which the person before him is remarkable. That might be very interesting to a writer of fiction, a physiognomist, or even a police agent : a priest has no business with anything of the kind. A confession is not a biography ; and, in the presence of an offended GOD, nothing is to be thought of except that one by which all men are reduced to the same level. For “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of GOD.” Alas ! how familiar is that path of disobedience ! and how little is unintelligible either in the story now being told, or the motives of the offender, or even the cloak of deceit which he may try to wrap around him ! Is not he who listens of the same flesh and blood with him who kneels by his side ?

Chiefly, however, the priest does all as trusting to be aided by great spiritual gifts from his LORD—counsel, knowledge, and ghostly strength. Trusting indeed earnestly. For the Master who gave him this charge, is He whom “the FATHER sent to be the Saviour of the world.”¹ “Grace to help in time of need” will, therefore, assuredly not be refused to one who holds commission from the Redeemer of mankind. For something more than natural sagacity is required to fill the tribunal of penitence.

And as to the gifts of the Spirit, who does not know that they may be had ? These things are the daily food of faith, the very common-places of the Christian religion. But it is at times like these that they come home to our hearts with a fresh force of joy, when we feel how they make the whole difference to a ministry which would else be a blind leading of the blind.

III. Now, therefore, with confidence restored, and the cloud of uncertainty cleared away, let CHRIST'S servant and deputy spare no effort to make himself an able minister. It has been well observed that he combines the duties of judge and physician ; and that his judgment will not be trustworthy unless he keeps

¹ See 1 S. John iv. 14. The apostle's words, ὁ Πατήρ ἀπέσταλκε τὸν υἱὸν σωτήρα τοῦ κόσμου, sound as if he was thinking of, and explaining, what he had heard from the very lips of the Incarnate SON, καθὼς ἀπέσταλκε με ὁ Πατήρ (S. John xx. 21).

healing in view at the same time as judging. This is none the less true, although we reject the idea of prolonged medical treatment for the spiritual patient. However simple the immediate remedies, they should form a reliable foundation for the recovery which is hoped for. "Am I proposing more than this wounded soul can bear? or am I, on the contrary, suggesting so light a discipline, that he will go forth and forget his good intentions, as the morning cloud passeth away?" Even in respect of the sorrow manifested, the priest will always judge better if he takes his stand, not on the degree of repentance perceptible at the moment, but on that towards which his penitent may be supposed advancing, by the sure impulse of Divine grace. He should try to think whether, in this case, attrition promises to deepen into contrition, or whether there is room to fear that the grief is altogether emotional and transitory. He will be ever studying the soul's health at the same time as the interests of Divine justice.

Now, if he is to expect good success in this endeavour, it is needless to say that he must give attention to the subject beforehand. The skill required by a physician is not to be had instinctively. As, in the fifth chapter of Galatians, the apostle wrote down nine fair virtues, "the fruit of the Spirit," destined to be victorious over those "works of the flesh" which had gone before; so should every priest be ready with proper remedies for each harmful thing that has come to light in a confession. But that he cannot do, unless he has thought, and read, and prayed; spending much time under the branches of the tree of life, gathering the healing leaves.

Does this mean that he should be an adept in the science of casuistry? That is a regular part of the training of the Roman Catholic clergy; and one may be sure that they have found practical advantages in the system. S. Paul himself may have thought it worthy of some attention.¹ Men like S. Basil, S. Charles, S. Francis de Sales, and our own Jeremy Taylor, bowed their shoulders to the burden. Yet casuistry "pierces through with many sorrows" those who pursue it; and although the motive is laudable, there is probably no such

¹ See 1 Cor. v., vii., viii.

thing as a perfect adaptation of moral canons to living examples. Besides, there is another question. Most of the old rules are good and true—however painful the reading of them—but would not one's own common sense and experience have arrived at much the same results? Jeremy Taylor's *Ductor Dubitantium* is admirable; but the reason we admire it is, that the maxims agree so wonderfully with our own perceptions of right and wrong. Those, then, who prefer to dispense themselves from threading the tortuous paths of human transgression, may have some excuse in the expectation that, should emergencies arise, their own natural discretion, aided by experience, would supply the demand. If juniors find themselves in serious perplexity, let them refer to their seniors, asking permission for this from their penitents; but let us have pure air, and free space to walk in, while we may. The vast bare plains of Africa are more wholesome than the dense jungle of the tropics.

And yet we dare not speak in disparagement of holy men who have embraced this yoke, always, and solely, in the hope of saving souls for CHRIST. Let us honour those who toiled so patiently amid these gloomy labyrinths, that they might rescue poor wretches lying "in darkness and the shadow of death." A priest who has no books of casuistry must still prepare himself for judging and healing in the penitential court. He must make his experience fruitful through vigilance; meditate often on the Master's great sermon; set before him the humility of the saints and their hatred of sin; be taught by the eloquence of the sacred Passion; propose to his mind the severity of the Last Judgment. And he must invoke the HOLY SPIRIT to make him faithful, and patient to the end.

As to the virtues most essential for discharging this office:—First and foremost is that "fear of the LORD" which "is the beginning of wisdom." S. Charles recommended that the immediate preparation for hearing confessions should be by repeating the fifty-first psalm.¹ Then, the meekness which

¹ Compare the language of an ancient Collect:—

Adesto, Domine, supplicationibus nostris, et me, qui etiam misericordia tua primus indigeo, clementer exaudi; et quem non electione

would not refuse or put back any whose desire for spiritual help is sincere. Then, long-suffering in bearing with tedious stories and waste of time. Sometimes, too, a necessary sharpness in rebuking or even dismissing persons who have no right to be there. But always tenderness of compassion towards those in heavy sorrow or distress of mind.¹ Shunning of familiarity. Determination to allow no respect of persons, no difference between rich and poor. The work is not without snares to an ambitious spirit: on first beginning, young men are sometimes tempted to draw numbers to resort to them, and to make to themselves a reputation for spiritual ability. This, while it lasts, is a form of pride more subtle and dangerous than any ordinary love of fame. If not mortified, it will lead to jealousy of other priests, and mischief of various kinds. Happily, it seldom lasts long. The advice given in a confessional is not received with applause like that which follows a popular preacher. In a short time the confessor will have renounced his dreams of becoming famous, and his daily prayer will then be for grace to bear up under the sadness and monotony of his task. Such monotony is inevitable. The devil's avenues are few in number; his methods of attack quickly grow familiar; the same stories have to be listened to in never-ending succession; even in the manner of confessing there is scarcely any variety. What refuge then remains for the worn-out pastor?

Spiritual writers dwell much on the causes for thankfulness. They point out many opportunities that a confessor enjoys, for promoting his own sanctification, and for doing good. First, he learns to have a great fear and horror of sin. "Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate Thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against Thee? Yea, I hate them right sore, even as though they were mine enemies." For instance, he may have to watch over the conduct of some unhappy creature struggling with the thirst for strong drink. By rights

meriti, sed dono gratiæ tuæ constituisti operis hujus ministrum, da fiduciam tui muneris exequendi, etc. (*Oratio ad reconciliandum pœnitentem.*)

¹ Remembering that He whom we represent is the ἐλεήμων καὶ πιστὸς ἀρχιερεὺς (*Heb. ii. 17*).

that soul should have been free of direction long ago. But, alas! he is so helpless when the temptation seizes him, that to go and leave him now would be like throwing him to the wolves. So again and again that "great offence" is repeated with all the shame and scandal that it causes; and again and again the same miserable confession has to be made. O the grief of seeing this happen to one whom baptism had consecrated for a temple of the HOLY GHOST, and who, in his sober moments, is full of love for higher things! But even sadder is the dealing with him who has been made the victim of evil companions; whom the priest knows to be longing and praying to escape! yet, from these few moments of peace before GOD'S altar, seldom granted or hardly snatched, he must hurry back to where the enemies of his soul await him. Perhaps in some den of iniquity; or, perhaps, among the company assembled in a luxurious mansion—a very hell upon earth for all its splendour. There, too surely, he will find his tempters ready. "Am not I grieved with those that rise up against Thee?" It is terrible; and yet the lesson is one for which the priest may thank GOD. For there are things he knows about himself—vicious tendencies that he had within him long ago, or even lately—which might have had consequences as bad as any of these. But GOD has made his sacred calling as it were an inviolable hedge for his protection. Wherefore he thanks his LORD and Master for the security that has come through knowing, as only a priest can, what the hatefulness of sin really is.

But this, if it were all, would be a selfish kind of contentment. The real compensation is in being permitted to lift the terrible weight of a besetting sin from one whom it would else have crushed. What consoles the priest amid all the dreariness and darkness, is his persuasion that his penitent and he have their faces turned towards the sunshine, and that they will be brought out at last into a land of liberty. Very often the confessions heard are not saddening, but, on the contrary, full of beautiful examples of religious earnestness. Very often it is in listening to them that there is given, as it were, a new revelation of how a predestined soul loves GOD,

and desires for His sake to be perfect. Few things are more wonderful than the longing of many a poor mother to bring up her children for CHRIST, and the depth of her sorrow for small infirmities of temper—so anyone else would call them—which interfere with this aim.¹ But none know of this except the priest to whom she comes, and the angels. Who then will deny that hearing of confessions may promote his sanctification? Does he not return from the church glad at heart, and saying many times to his own soul, “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good?”

Thankfulness should extend farther than this. There are deliverances which have been wrought already, as well as those which hope expects. Now, one feels that it must be right to acknowledge what GOD has done by His minister with a *Non nobis Domine*; yet many will hesitate to speak in any way of their own past achievements. Indeed a priest who quotes his own performances is hardly justified, unless either there are facts which GOD’S glory requires should not be forgotten, or the mention of which would encourage a young brother, inclined for the moment to despond. *Here*, however, the question is not of *speaking* at all. No priest may speak of what has come to pass in his private dealings with souls.² But that he should quietly remember times when, after pardon pronounced by his lips, the soul forgiven went forth with joy to meet old temptations, and to prevail over them—that is a different thing.³ There can be nothing of vain-glory in that silent uplifting of the heart, on witnessing these new and wonderful tokens of another’s salvation. And still less should he be accused of sinful boasting if he calls these things to mind many years later, when the recollection that he did not labour in vain will give him patience under trials greater than before.

¹ Only less wonderful than the confidence felt by Christian parents in the truth and goodness of their children, for whom they continually give thanks while they pray.

² Unless he can guard against all risk of the person being identified: which is not often possible. If he fails, he has broken the seal.

³ See the *Memoir of Charles Lowder* (10th edit.), p. 162 :—“I have still ringing in my heart the cry of two poor labouring lads who had just made their first confession, and who came to me, their hearts bursting with joy too great to bear : ‘Ah, sir, if we could die now!’”

"Yet not I, but the grace of GOD which was with me." *He*, at least, needs no convincing that there is a special grace attached to the ministry of Penitence.

IV. The English Church provides nothing in the shape of early training for this office. But the truest principle, surely, is that which is most obvious. A man who is to be a judge and healer of others must know himself well in the first place.¹ By a twofold process—by self-examination, namely, and by meditation. To meditate on the Passion is most generally advised, because at the foot of the Cross, as nowhere else, is contrition learned. Nothing, perhaps, is quite so good for directing the intention, or recalling thoughts which too easily wander, as that simple prayer, "O Saviour of the world, who by Thy Cross and precious Blood hast redeemed us, Save us and help us, we humbly beseech Thee, O LORD." Then, the life as well as the death—the life of Him who is our Life. A priest who hears confessions should often set before him that mighty resurrection to which he is leading the souls once dead in sin. He should call on JESUS, "the Resurrection and the Life." He should look to be raised in his own inner life, before he conducts the pardoned to that first communion of reconciliation, which is to be to them the foretaste of a blessed immortality. He should hunger for that living Bread, using, if he will, the music of that noble metre so famous in the annals of sacred minstrelsy:—

"Vive Panis, vivax unda,
Vera Vitis et fœcunda,
Tu nos pasce, tu nos munda,
Ut a morte nos secunda
Tua salvet gratia!"²

V. If there is no special training, there are no limitations either, in the English Church. Before the Reformation,

¹ S. Gregory the Great says (*Pastoral Rule*, part II., Mr. Bramley's translation), "They 'bear the vessels of the LORD,' who take upon them to carry the souls of their neighbours by the faithfulness of their conversation to the eternal sanctuary. Let them, therefore, consider with themselves how much they ought to be cleansed who carry living vessels," etc.

² From Adam of S. Victor (in Trench's *Sacred Latin Poetry*).

the rule in England was that of the Lateran Council, A.D. 1215; where, by the 21st Canon, it was enacted that all the faithful, of both sexes, should once a year confess to their own priest (*proprio sacerdoti*). This was understood to mean their parish priest. In addition, many of the Friars and other Religious had faculties granted them for hearing confessions; and the Roman Catholic laity are now allowed a large choice of confessors, though these must always have had a faculty to begin with. But in the English Church, since it became independent of Rome, the necessary authority has been conveyed, as a matter of course, together with the priesthood.¹ All whom the Archdeacon presents to the Bishop, if no impediment is alleged, receive through his imposed hands the power to absolve, duly emphasised in the form of words employed. Many persons now object to this, thinking that the licence so freely granted ought to be restricted to the fit and competent. No doubt there should be a limit of age, subject to possible exceptions. With us, as in the Roman Church, priests under thirty-five should not hear the confessions of women. Perhaps that is the only reform that should be made a law of the Church. Other arrangements are so obviously right and natural, that they are pretty sure to find favour without the bidding of Canons. As, that this kind of work should as a rule devolve upon rectors rather than assistant-curates (though with exceptions allowed wherever a younger man appears to have a vocation which the elder lacks). Most certainly there are cases in which it is best that the priest should not be too advanced in years. Even for women (as experience is apt to show quite as well as the books of ascetical writers) "short and severe" treatment is sometimes wisest; whereas the elder clergy may incline to be too gentle. But, on the whole, the ministry of Penitence is a business on which "days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom."²

¹ On the Roman theory, the power to absolve depends not merely on a true Ordination, but on the right of jurisdiction, which those in schism cannot have. (See S. Thomas, *Summa*, part II. 2, qu. xxxix. art. 3.)

² Job. xxxii. 7.

VI. The preponderance of married clergy in England must be mentioned as a difficulty. Either the ladies who frequent the parsonage, friends of the wife and daughters, are pious people desirous of spiritual attention, and then the trial may be great to the priest's own help-mate; or else it is a worldly group that assembles there, and then their presence is a hindrance to that higher life which a guide of souls ought certainly to cultivate. It is by no means easy to bring the seal of confession into accord with the social habits of English families; and, as one does not wish to consider Anglican methods as in every respect unalterable, let a hope be here expressed that we may see the ministry of Penitence assigned more and more to celibates.¹

VII. Although seniors should have most of this service, seniors are not generally best for the oversight of boys. Once in their lives, boys should receive instruction on the watch to be kept against the uprising of certain secret sins.² The instruction should be brief, plain, and peremptory, though not unkindly; and it should never be repeated again. He who gives it should not be too far removed from the age of the boys themselves. When he has shown the difference between what is merely natural, and familiarities which are wicked and dangerous, his lesson will have been delivered once for all. There will be no occasion thenceforth for asking questions at the time of confession, of a sort loathsome to the *ingenuus pudor* of a high-principled lad. But it is most necessary for boys to hear this matter spoken of once in their lives, with all gravity and in the fear of GOD. Otherwise they may soon be entrapped. Conscience pleads but faintly from out of the deep void of inexperience; and a thing which in itself is felt to be wrong may yet be supposed innocent because no voice is raised to condemn it. It is in combating this evil, that our junior English clergy have behaved like true protecting angels.

¹ See Dr. Mason's advice on this subject, in chap. vi. of his very admirable book, *The Ministry of Conversion*.

² Parents and elder brothers have been known to do this, with the best results: but the examples are probably rare.

VIII. In early times, the minister (who was usually the bishop) would have sat in the middle of the church to absolve; and the penitential court would have been accessible only during the hours of daylight. With us, the time has to be extended, so as to make allowance for working men, or for those kept late at their business. The open church is still preferred by many; but the Roman confessional seems really the best solution of that difficult problem, how to have no concealment, and yet to cherish a modest reserve. The "box" is perhaps unsightly, but it would not be easy to improve upon it for practical purposes.

In concluding this chapter on the priest's preparation, let a word of protest be allowed to the author. He refuses, with all the firmness of which he is capable, to listen to the suggestions, too often made, of scandals arising from the use of ministerial absolution. One may regret, indeed, the passionate indignation with which some on the Catholic side have hurled back their defiance at calumniators. Although

"The purest treasure mortal times afford
Is spotless reputation: that away,
Men are but gilded loam, or painted clay,"

we will not learn from the author of that sentiment to say, farther, to our traducer—

"as low as thy heart,
Through the false passage of thy throat, thou liest!"¹

But one may refuse to listen, though at the same time he abstains from imputing motives. I have never myself, in the course of a long experience, come upon the least trace of anything disgraceful in the conference of priest with penitent. For the former, if he is an honest man, the hearing of confessions must greatly increase respect for human nature, and confidence in the power of sanctifying grace. And I do verily believe that if anywhere under the sun blameless lives are led, they are those of the great majority of our Anglican clergy. So that the following conclusion (no doubt applicable equally to those of another communion, for whom it was intended), is

¹ Shakspeare's *King Richard II.*, Act ii. sc. 1.

what I wish to state as my own by a very cordial adoption:—
 “Of all pastoral ministrations there is none which involves a more self-denying devotion to a monotonous duty, none where the good effects are so plain and visible, and very few which are more seldom marred by human weakness and sin.”¹

Then—

“LORD, pour Thy Spirit from on high,
 And Thine ordained servants bless;
 Graces and gifts to each supply,
 And clothe Thy priests with righteousness.

“Wisdom, and zeal, and faith impart,
 Firmness with meekness, from above,
 To bear Thy people in their heart,
 And love the souls whom Thou dost love.

“So, when their work is finished here,
 May they in hope their charge resign;
 So when their Master shall appear,
 May they with crowns of glory shine.”

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE.

YET still a few words more on this important and difficult part of our subject. Let me address them directly to brother-missionaries.

The fact is too plain that, wherever our own countrymen are found (the foreign mission-field will be alluded to hereafter), a great majority would prefer never to hear the absolving words spoken from the lips of a clergyman. We need not think of the mob, nor of the godless rich. The real trouble is that our best-educated and most honourable men are against us. They do not attempt to persecute, but they hate the subject of penitence, and avoid coming in contact with the clergy. This mischief appears to be on the increase. Busied as we are with frequent services, and having our days, indeed, fully occupied with attending to immediate supporters, we barely touch a large class whose life and work are important to the welfare of society, and should be, also, to the Church of God.

¹ Quoted from Addis and Arnold's [Roman] *Catholic Dictionary*. (When I speak of “blameless lives,” I refer to the one point, of social purity. We, the English clergy, have failings enough of other kinds, and some for which the laity might do well to reprove us much more than they do. Alas! how little is there of “contending earnestly for the faith!” How many might be counted whose “knees have bowed unto ‘Mammon,’ and whose mouths have kissed him!”)

The following thoughts, familiar to the present writer, may be worth offering for consideration :—

First, this estrangement of the laity has proceeded so far, that one cannot expect to do more than a very little, in one's own life-time, towards healing it. Nevertheless, each priest has his own particular cure of souls; and, whatever the state of feeling abroad, many of us know that it is quite possible to live and be well understood by the earnest people of one's own parish. This may amount to little more than a pleasant good-natured intercourse, and exchange of civilities. But surely one need not quite despair of coming to closer quarters, if the priest will discard that manner which is often called sacerdotalism, but is really only a form of proud and uncharitable reserve. Many sensible laymen exist who would be glad to understand better what the clergy mean about confession. It is true that they are not commonly inclined to take much trouble to secure an interview; and busy men *at home* have not the same facilities for meeting out of business hours, that they might enjoy on the deck of an Atlantic steamer. S. Paul "received all that went to him in his own hired dwelling:" but the difficulty now is, that they do not come. Yet, at least, one ought to try one's best. The talk, if it could be had, would perhaps not bring about any vital change of conviction or of private practice; but it would dissipate a great deal of prejudice—enough solid gain to begin with. Moreover, through free discussion of a controverted point like confession, educated men are sometimes led on to face the question of amending their own lives, who would have refused a direct appeal.

The next advice is, whenever this subject has to be mentioned, either privately or from the pulpit, by all means to "speak truth in love." In love; and therefore with modesty, not offending by absurd affectation or arrogance. But still, to speak truth. Thirty years ago there was a fashion of preaching confession "all the days:" now, perhaps, we have run into the opposite extreme. By the inner circle, confession is now perfectly understood and practised; and such a multitude of these devout ones come round the priest, that he thinks he may use the ministry without obliging himself to invite to it. But meanwhile, those outside are the more offended by a secrecy and reserve which excite their suspicions.

If we believe the whole of the Church's doctrines, we are not free to keep silence as to one which, if it is most disliked, is also more misrepresented through ignorance than any other. Even if but once in the year, we should hold out the Church's keys to all who have fallen from their baptismal grace; and we should say why we do so, and what we mean. Are not some of us much too fearful of risking popularity? There are times when a missionary should go to his work with "Blessed be the LORD my strength, who teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight." That is what Charles Lowder or Richard West would have

said, if they had been living still. A timid priest deserves nothing but woe, to himself and all his works.

One thing remains to be added. Let us never be unthankful for the souls that God does give to our care. Suppose it were true, that up to thirty-five a priest is engaged with boys; after that, with women? In point of fact, *no* missionary's influence is so restricted. But, if it were true? Are not these labours such as bring their reward? Is it nothing, that boys should learn by this means to hate and forsake sins to which they will be tempted in manhood's ripeness? Nothing, that the fervour of good women should here be wisely regulated, and trained, perhaps, to ceaseless activities of mercy, through the deep and sober earnestness with which they turn from acknowledged faults? Was not the youngest of all the Twelve nearest to our Saviour's heart? Were not women the first to whom He showed Himself after He was risen, the first heralds of His resurrection, the first whom He invited to touch Him with the prayer of faith?

Let there be nothing of restless dissatisfaction in a work like this. It is circumscribed, that is certain: many doors, that we would fain see opened, are jealously shut against us. Yet we seek souls and save them, as our Master charged us; and though our presence be hateful to those who are His enemies, or viewed with cold dislike, alas! even by some of His faithful friends, to others we may approve ourselves "a sweet savour of CHRIST unto GOD"—a savour "from life unto life."

But we cannot rest here. Mention has been made of the prejudices entertained by a great majority of our countrymen. We must be thankful for the pious and docile remnant who do not share those prejudices: but should we leave the rest to their own devices, if we have failed, even by the most prudent and patient arguments, to convince them that confession is right? Some will answer, that that is the only thing to be done; we must "shake off the dust" and forsake them. For my own part, since I do not consider that the gate of GOD's mercy is absolutely barred against all who do not use the sacramental key, I am inclined to look round for some other means to introduce conviction of sin and amendment of life. The unconverted are to be reckoned by millions. If most of these are hardened against the full and blessed truth, by the fault of their bringing-up and environment, we may still perhaps touch the hearts of some by a simple preaching of the Cross. Surely our own Pusey and Liddon would have approved of this; to say nothing of S. Chrysostom, S. Bernard, and S. Francis. So long as we can point the way to a living Saviour, we are not the blind guides that some pretend. It is true that His own way of confession and absolution must be the best by which to find Him: but if it should be possible, even without that, to bring the lost sheep within hearing of the Shepherd's voice? Also, when the magnitude of the task is realised, and the immense extent of the field, ought not other willing workers to be enlisted, besides the clergy? If

they may not preach, in the strict canonical sense, they may still find convenient times for addressing an audience of their neighbours and comrades; and they may pray with them. All devout laymen, indeed, are not companions of S. Francis: all pious women are not S. Catherines; and, as a rule, this work is most prudently enterprised and carried on through the agencies of Guilds or Religious communities, working under the clergyman's eye. For, after all, it is the Mission-priest himself who, living among the people, should be best able to approach them for their souls' good, even though "those dread keys" are not carried in his hand. But truly this is a time of sore distress. The harvest is great, but the labourers are few. I am not ashamed that I have myself listened, thankfully and humbly, to the boisterous music of "The Army," making its honest effort in our streets. Who can forbid any true-hearted workers in such a cause as penitence? "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!"

CHAPTER XI.

In the Mission Field.

IT is characteristic of S. Luke's Gospel, that the great commission recorded by S. Matthew to "go and make disciples of all nations," should have its place taken there by a charge to "preach repentance," to the same world-wide audience. "Thus it is written, that the CHRIST should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." Perhaps our LORD'S reference may have been to the psalmist, who saw in the pierced Hands and Feet an encouragement to "all the ends of the earth to remember and turn unto the LORD;" or to that serpent of brass which prefigured His own "lifting up from the earth," whereby He "drew all men unto Him." But, by whomsoever this had been foretold, the important thing is that JESUS did not so much send His apostles to hold classes of instruction, or to inculcate a higher moral code, as to proclaim to the heathen world GOD'S eternal purpose; namely, to save them from their sins through the precious Blood of His dear SON. Thus from the first advance of the Catholic army upon the regions of darkness, its foremost weapon and instrument of conquest has been the doctrine of "repentance toward GOD, and faith toward our LORD JESUS CHRIST." Our ascended King, to whom "the nations have been given for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession," admits these new subjects to His kingdom by the baptismal washing, the healing of Absolution, the reconciliation in the Blessed Eucharist.

As a matter of fact, the preaching of the Gospel dates from the tears of Magdalene,¹ the "turning" of Peter,² the "apprehension" of Saul the persecutor.³

Wherever the need of repentance is understood and accepted, there the Gospel spreads, even to this day. At the present time, the missionary Church has two great and enormous tasks set before it. Asia is to be converted to Christianity, and so is Africa. Why is one of these enterprises discouraging, while the other is full of hope? What makes the contrast between the slow growth in Asia, and the quick ripening in Africa? Missionaries do not hesitate to assign the cause. They say that the eastern races have, as a rule, little sense of sin: and therefore CHRIST crucified is preached to them in vain. The negro tribes, on the other hand, are capable of better feeling, and by no means indifferent to their need of a Saviour. In the short space which this chapter is to cover, we shall, perhaps, do best if we confine our attention to these more receptive natures.

Many will have felt a delightful freedom in undertaking missionary work in Africa. This light-hearted people, so tractable, so eager to learn, seem to offer the most glorious opportunities to an evangelist.⁴ How one sees them still in fancy, crowding round a new arrival from England, attentive to his least request, impatient to hear or to follow him whithersoever he pleases! It seems too good to be true, that one can shake off one's bondage to Puritanical or Scholastic accretions, and proclaim everywhere among them the simple and happy faith of the Primitive Church. "It is CHRIST JESUS that died, yea, rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of GOD, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of CHRIST?" There is something exhilarating, too, in the aspect that poverty wears out yonder; so seldom is it felt as a curse, so little of sullen discontent goes

¹ S. John xx. 15-19.

² S. Luke xxii. 32.

³ Philipp. iii. 12; compare 1 Cor. xv. 8-11; 1 Tim. i. 12-17.

⁴ Compare the *Epistle to Diognetus* (chap v.), "Every foreign land is to Christians as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers."

with it. One begins to understand better the Saviour's own pleasure in preaching the Gospel to the poor.

So, then, the more simple-minded heathen are gathered into the fold by the Sacrament of Baptism. This is offered to them, just as it would have been of old, to be their entrance into a new life, bearing fruit unto holiness. But they are not thus "initiated" without a good deal of trouble. For, by this time, what had appeared at first simple eagerness has been proved to carry with it very little of earnestness or stability. The average African remembers scarcely anything of what he has been taught, and understands even less than he remembers. Nor is it possible to make him a Christian without the sacrifice of heathen habits and customs, some of which he is most reluctant to part with. In short, for many reasons, the catechumenate is an ordeal which few will face, unless the chiefs and head men have set the fashion. What makes the great difference between Africa and India, or China, is, that African chiefs sometimes do lead the way, and then the people's natural eagerness is seen, very quickly, in a wave of conversion which spreads through the tribe. But the African requires leading in his temporal concerns as well as spiritual. Even in a quiet West Indian settlement,¹ there is little hope of contesting the influence of an individual land-owner, if used against the Church: while a zealous native catechist will often be loyally obeyed by all around. Thus the progress of a Mission is far from uniform: but, as growth in one spot compensates for barrenness in others, on the whole a considerable number of baptisms are registered at each Easter and Pentecost.

The Gospel preached is always a Gospel of Repentance. The change, to a baptized convert, can be no less than passing "from darkness to light." Of much, that even the gentler heathen manners permit, the apostle would say, "I tell you plainly, that they which practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of GOD." Thus the vow of renunciation will always

¹ The author's acquaintance is chiefly with the *transplanted* negro; but he has visited Africa too, in former years, and believes that the same type of character is found on both sides of the Atlantic.

have considerable force for an African neophyte. Contrition is another matter. S. Paul speaks of converts being "ashamed" of things done before the new birth, but he was not appealing then to the most ignorant; and one can see that it is nearly impossible for these to feel deep sorrow, when they are giving up this or that chiefly because an English clergyman says that they ought. All this is perfectly natural. But yet the absence of contrition for what is past makes the future full of danger to the newly-baptized.

Fear of men's threatening is always the chief motive to apostasy. So it was under the old persecutions of the Cæsars. Men repudiated their Christian profession because they dreaded the prospect of exile or death, or because they were worn out by protracted torture. Now, when the *quæstio* in all its horrors is no longer to be apprehended, nor the "putting out of the synagogue" (so to speak), except in countries where the tyranny of caste prevails, a newly-baptized Christian may still have something worse than petty annoyance to endure from his heathen neighbours. His wife may forsake him, or his crops be burned, or he may be delated to the chief for witchcraft. Or, where persecution is quite unknown, and there is nothing to be afraid of, a convert's natural fickleness and instability may move him to escape from the Church's rules, as lightly as he would change his coat. Other frequent lapses after baptism are of the kind common among a half-savage populace: by revenge, slander, murderous assault; by trafficking in charms and spells; or by matrimonial unfaithfulness. There is so little idea of self-control, that some such breaches of the baptismal covenant are almost certain to occur. And baptism cannot be postponed indefinitely. Many of our missionaries, indeed, require their adult candidates to submit to a training of several years' duration. Even then, if they expect perseverance from the font onwards, they are generally disappointed.

Yet there is good hope, in most cases, of ultimate improvement. These people are still teachable, though they forget. They are amiable and warm-hearted, though it may be a mistake to look for real strength of affection in a savage. The heart usually needs to be trained, as well as the mind and

memory : nevertheless, the African is eminently susceptible of good impressions. And one thing more is in his favour. If he has failed to control himself, he perfectly understands that it is his place to be controlled by the white man. What, then, is to be done? As to that there can be no doubt at all. He must fully learn that lesson which he could only have half learned before his baptism—the lesson of penitence. It is easier to learn now. In the first place, a missionary should have no difficulty in pointing out to him the difference between this latter fall of his and the sins which he committed while a heathen. Those were done in ignorance: this in violation of a solemn vow made to the holy GOD in whom he had been taught to believe, and from whom he had received grace to lead a new life. He sees, then, how wrong it would be for him to claim the full privileges of Church membership, or to approach the altar for communion, until, through some serious punishment of self, he has sought and obtained reinstatement in the baptismal condition, and has been received once more into the family of GOD. After he has come to acknowledge thus much, the next thing is to bring him on from a mere willingness to be punished, into the state of true conversion to GOD. This is most important. Missionaries are often tempted to fall back upon something like the old exomologesis. Excommunication, followed by public disgrace, and at last by restoration—this, they think, is exactly what their people can best understand and profit by. Now, however indispensable excommunication may be, it is not enough, by itself, to awaken the conscience to right thoughts about sin and about GOD. Even if the people, at the sort of mission-station we are considering, could be trusted to punish each other with discretion, or would understand any discipline which conflicted with their own traditions, we must still remember that the supposed offender would not be helped by his sentence of exclusion to get at the roots and causes of his transgression. And unless he knew those, it is unlikely that his punishment would produce in him any fixed purpose of amendment: there would be no sorrow for sin. For example, he might be excommunicated for wounding or cursing his neighbour: but

something more would be required to make him pray earnestly for the spirit of meekness and patience. Here, then, it is that Confession and Absolution have their place in the mission-field. They dispose converts using them to mourn over their disobedience, to desire heartily to forsake their sin, and to promise amendment, not to the congregation only, but in the sight of the great and holy GOD.

Confession to a priest is the only way, for them. You cannot send them, like well-trained Christians in a civilised country, to construct their own forms of prayer, to make out their own way back to GOD. It was not for such as these that S. Chrysostom and S. Augustine enjoined the Our FATHER, with almsgiving, as an all-sufficient remedy. They are children in understanding, and their pastors should treat them, accordingly, with the care which befits children. Thus, to glance back at the titles of the last two chapters, "the preparation of the penitent" and "the preparation of the minister" are not so much two corresponding duties, as the sole business of the *priest*, who has to lead and prompt the confession, as well as to receive it. It is a great responsibility, and perhaps he should feel that to come to the task with entire lowliness of mind is more important than any other care in preparation. Missionaries, indeed, cannot be too watchful against the sin of arrogance. They are forced to take a lead abroad, for the sake of "these sheep," which they would have had to wait long before they were fit for, among educated people at home. Above all things, therefore, must they pray to be kept humble when they hear confessions. That done, let them give their whole attention to these poor wanderers. The main point is to instil contrition by showing them the wickedness of certain definite sins—not, in their case, to mix great matters with small, but to fix their regards upon the evil which GOD hates, and which ought "not so much as to be named" among His redeemed. One must still not expect too much. Even at this stage, they may not be able to appropriate the apostolic teaching, that they have "crucified to themselves the SON of GOD afresh, and put Him to an open shame." But yet it is scarcely probable that they will fail in outward signs of emotion. They will have come

eagerly to confession, when invited, and the same eagerness will be shown in accusing and bewailing themselves for what they have to confess. They are like S. Augustine's flock, whom he saw beating their breasts directly the word "confession" was mentioned.¹ The really hard thing is to make an impression deep enough, if not to last for a great while, at least to prevent foolish behaviour when they quit the church. There is a strong inclination to disregard the confidence which the priest holds so sacred, by talking to neighbours freely, and alas! not always quite truthfully, of what has just been discussed in the confessional. In short, the African has much to learn of the "fear," as well as the "love," of GOD'S Holy Name. But it is not right to keep his affections starved because for a long time he will be deficient in awe for sacred things. Within proper safeguards, he must be allowed an emotional form of penitence. Nothing in the shape of public discipline would have the effect that confession has, in winning his heart to right objects, and to the love of JESUS crucified. Hereafter, when that love is weighted by better knowledge, he will have a beginning of the fear which he cannot feel now.

Such converts as we have had in view are usually more than willing to use confession, so soon as the duty has been explained to them.² It is not uncommon for the number of those confessing before Easter to be as large, or even larger, than that of the communicants at the Feast itself. But the sheep must have a distinct leading from their pastor. Where that is refused, there may be great crowds of communicants, but much sacrilege, and very little Christianity. Would that our Foreign Missions were more true to that original note of penitence, impressed upon His Church by her Divine Founder! "That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

Surely we should have a larger episcopal consent to the system that has been advocated if the moral *status* of most heathen converts were duly pondered. Simple Africans or

¹ See S. Aug. Sermon. xxix. chap. ii. :—"Sunt enim parum eruditi, qui cum audierint confessionem in Scripturis, continuo tundunt pectora."

² Father Puller tells me that he has found this the case in South Africa.

Melanesians are not deceived by refinements of evil. They know, though with a rude perception, that there is "no concord between CHRIST and Belial."¹ But evil looks stronger to them than good; and the powers of evil will bind them hand and foot, if they are not succoured. Against this has to be set their confidence in their clergy, and, of course, the all-sufficiency of Divine grace, which the clergy minister. From their "Fathers" they will accept discipline, if need be, as well as absolution—discipline like that enjoined by the old Anglo-Saxon Council,² "according to the judgment of the priests, and the measure of the offence." Perhaps, too, a public reconciliation might be useful after the ancient pattern;³ carried out *coram sancto altari*, in the presence of the faithful assembled. But then there should have been private confession in the first instance: else the lesson of penitence would remain unlearned, and instead of strength to the soul, there would only be labour and sorrow.

Contrition cannot exist without love, and the awakening of the affections is therefore a necessary part of penitence. We have seen that it should be so in the mission-field: but we may satisfy ourselves that the same is indispensable everywhere. This is indeed evident; because, wherever repentance is genuine, the soul is brought back, in *all* its faculties, to the service of the long-forsaken Master. The affections, therefore, must form part of the offering. These cannot be excluded. The love of the penitent heart is "without hypocrisy," true and tender, both to GOD and man. Again, since this love is manifested in sorrow for the deep ingratitude of past disobedience, there can hardly be Christian repentance without some display of emotion. Accordingly, we read in the life of S. Ambrose, that his feelings were deeply stirred by hearing confessions: he wept, himself, in compassion for the grief that he witnessed in others. The same thing is recorded of other holy men.

Yet, in England at least, and in these days, it is usual to

¹ See Milton (*Par. Lost*, bk. ii.): "Belial, in act more graceful and humane . . . his thoughts were low, To vice industrious . . . yet he pleased the ear." Such a being would rather be a tempter to the polite and luxurious.

² The Council of Cealchythe (Can. xx.) A.D. 787.

³ See *Constit. Apostol.* lib. ii. 41. Also Martene, vol. ii. p. 28; Pelliccia (Engl. trans.), p. 469-472.

repress nearly all signs of emotion while confessions are being heard. One might say that the tone of the confessional is almost coldly severe. This is sometimes needful as a precaution, that so the intercourse between the two persons concerned may be blameless. Chiefly, however, it is enjoined for reverence of the awful majesty of Him, "Maker of all things, Judge of all men," into whose ears the confession is poured, and before whom the priest stands as minister. Some restraint of feeling is certainly right and wise. But what, then, becomes of the tribute of the affections?

Without breaking through the sacred veil of reserve, may it not be possible to train the heart some other way, both to love and to mourn? As for instance, by the plan already recommended; when the priest, gravely and quietly, contrasts the Divine goodness with the offences numbered in his hearing. Then, too, there are secondary helps not to be despised: such as hymns, pious pictures, music which touches the heart with indescribable pleading.¹ These influences *surround* the confessional, as it were, though they may not enter there. One symbol, too, most precious of all, does find a place within—the dear and sacred Crucifix. So long as the penitent feels that those Eyes are regarding him—that he is kneeling and praying where those outstretched Hands plead ever for his forgiveness—he will not be unmoved, nor make an unloving confession. So long as that same Figure hangs by the side of the absolving priest, he can never forget how alone "the merciful are blessed; for they shall obtain mercy."²

"A broken heart, a fount of tears,
Ask, and they will not be denied;
LORD JESUS, may we love and weep,
Since Thou for us art crucified."

¹ M. Huysmanns, in his popular story *En Route*, attributes his own conversion to the sweet influence of Compline, sung to the Church's plain-song.

² Still, this is a difficult matter in practice. No injury must be done to love; yet sobriety of judgment is imperilled by uncontrolled emotion. It is impossible to have the same rule for everybody. Most Anglo-Saxons would probably say, "Give us facts, and let feelings alone." On the other hand, Archer Butler, a man of Catholic convictions and most extraordinary intellect, is said to have broken with Rome simply because his Celtic warmth of feeling was repressed by an unsympathetic confessor.

CHAPTER XII.

Relation of Penitence to the two Sacraments of the Gospel: duration of the penitent condition.

"WE know that whosoever is begotten of GOD sinneth not. . . . The evil one toucheth him not." If the child of GOD went on as he began, there would be no institution of Penitence. Penitence has for its whole object the recovery of that justifying grace which, considered in itself, and from the side of GOD the giver, should have been indefectible. Penitence therefore, of necessity, comes into request after Baptism. Catechisms, whether of the Roman or the Eastern Church, declare its use to be for those who, after receiving the adoption of sons in CHRIST by spiritual regeneration, have returned to the bondage of sin. These are by its means "pardoned and delivered from all their sins," whether of thought, word, or deed. Our own Catechism lacks definitions of this or any of the lesser sacraments; but the intention of our Church is plainly the same, as appears from various places in the Prayer Book, and particularly the Visitation of the Sick.

We place Penitence confidently after Baptism (which at the present stage of enquiry we may take to include Confirmation, since that has always been understood as the completion of the initiatory rite). But its position with regard to Holy Communion is rather less easy to fix. If the first communion is proper to be received directly after baptism, surely there can be no ground between to be recovered by repentance? And surely, a healthy soul will see the way at once laid open for it to approach the altar? This is an important matter. In ancient times, tender years were not considered a bar to

partaking of "the mysteries." In the third century, as we know from S. Cyprian,¹ babes were carried in their parents' arms to receive the sacred Chalice; in the fourth, the *Apostolical Constitutions*² require mothers to hold and bring their little ones to the altar; in the fifth, though the meaning is not quite clear, both S. Augustine³ and S. Leo⁴ seem to speak of very young children being communicants. However, it does not appear that infant Communion became a general practice much before the ninth century. Of course it could not have been general where infant baptism was not also general, and therefore perhaps hardly anywhere at first except in the province of Africa. But Martene⁵ quotes a rubric of about A.D. 800, by which it is made imperative that the newly-baptized infant should receive first communion on the same day, even though no bishop were present to confirm beforehand. This was at Paris. But the custom cannot have obtained for very long in the Western Church, because it would be discontinued naturally when the Cup was forbidden to the laity, (the species of bread being unsuitable to infants :) whereas in the East, where little ones may be communicated in wine only, infant communion is still accounted lawful.⁶

There is no certain tradition of the origin of this infant communion. It seems to have been thought at one time that our LORD'S words in S. John vi. 53, would exclude from eternal

¹ S. Cyprian (*De Lapsis*, chap. xvi.).

² *Apostol. Constit.* lib. viii. chap. xii:—τὰ παῖδια προσλαμβάνεσθε, αἱ μητέρες.

³ S. Augustine refers to the communion of *infantes*, both in his anti-Pelagian treatises, and in several of his sermons; but as it appears that the *infantes* were old enough to receive instruction from him on the Mysteries, one cannot suppose that they were what we should now call infants or babes. Indeed, an "infant" seems to have been simply one born again, of whatever age:—"Qui paulo ante vocabantur competentes, modo vocantur infantes," (Serm. ccxxviii.). The usual references to this subject made from S. Augustine are, *Opus Imperf. contra Julian.* ii. 30: Serm. clxxiv. 7: (these two are very brief indeed); *De Peccator. Merit.* i. 20, and 24; and the series of Sermons ccxxiv.-ix.

⁴ See S. Leo (*Ep.* lix.) "Ut nec ab infantium linguis veritas corporis et sanguinis Christi inter communionis sacramenta taceatur."

⁵ Martene (*De Rit.* lib. i. chap. i. art. 18) refers to the Ritual of the great Abbey of S. Germain les Prés, founded by Childebert a little before 550.

⁶ See Mr. Scudamore's article in Smith and Cheetham's *Dict. Chr. Antiquities*.

life any who had not eaten His Flesh and drunk His Blood. That opinion would incline parents to bring their children at the very first opportunity, unless they were persuaded to think that "every one of the faithful who is made a member of CHRIST in baptism, partakes thereby of His Body and Blood."¹ But perhaps this subject need not engage our attention farther at present, because the practice has been discontinued, and we have forgotten the alarm about S. John vi. 53; affirming rather, as a thing "certain by GOD'S word, that children which are baptised, dying before they commit actual sin, are undoubtedly saved." The mind of the Western Church is that, for infants, the grace of their baptismal adoption suffices, since the only sin to which they are required to die is that *peccatum originis*, the universal taint, for which their own wills cannot be responsible. It is interesting to read a full and remarkable statement made by Lanfranc in answer to a question on this subject. (See Dean Stephens' *History of the English Church*, vol. ii. p. 57.)

However, we must also remember that *adult* catechumens during many centuries were admitted, on the day of their baptism, not only to confirmation, but to first communion.² Nor is the modern custom very different in this respect from the ancient. We lose sight of it a good deal in England, because adult baptisms are comparatively rare; but in the foreign Mission-field, as Easter Eve is again made an opportunity for "the laver of regeneration," so is Easter Day for the first Eucharist of the regenerate convert. This is a much greater step than it could be for the little ones. "As the man is, so is his strength." His soul will stand in need of much more than the new birth in baptism. He will require, first, a preventing or directing influence from heaven, for a true consecration of self to GOD; then, a force to protect, support, and comfort him under such trials and temptations as belong to riper years; but above all, a grace of fellowship with CHRIST the perfect Man, to be consummated hereafter in the entire union of the servant with the Master, of the derived life with

¹ See note in Benedict. Edit. (quoting S. Fulgentius,) to S. Aug. *De Peccator. Merit.* i. 20. See also Wilberforce *On the Holy Eucharist*, chap. viii., near the end.

² See Pelliccia, E.T., pp. 18, 19.

that which is absolute and eternal. These are the needs which Holy Communion supplies. Faith may indeed fail before the richness of the gift, so inconceivably "more than either we desire or deserve." Such words as the sixth chapter of S. John contains, about the mutual indwelling of CHRIST and the communicant, would be truly overwhelming if they were not so familiar. But there they stand, and we know that they are consistent with other words of His; as, for instance, His parable of the vine and branches. Apart from Him we cannot live. It is not enough to attempt a feeble imitation of what He is: we must "grow up in all things into Him, which is the Head, even CHRIST."

This growth, according to the Divine intention, is without decay: "he that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." But it is also clear that the union of soul with Soul should begin as soon as possible: and this brings our thoughts back again to—at all events—very early communion. He invites us to come to Him *now*. "All things are now ready." Thus if man or woman have been baptized late in life, there seems every reason why their progress from font to altar should be hastened to the utmost. But what after infant baptism? If some interval is then expedient, should it not be a shorter interval than what the common sentiment now enjoins? Surely the full purpose of Holy Communion can hardly be attained, unless the feeding upon CHRIST has dated from a soul's first conscious entrance upon its allotted course of trial. That would seem to have been what the Primitive Church had in mind, when not "infants of days" so much as quite young children, were admitted. "The virgins and widows, then the children, then all the people, reverently and in order."¹ "Children who cannot understand divine things are yet made partakers . . . of the divine communion of the most sacred mysteries."² Little though they might understand, yet they were bidden to the Feast; for life's trial had begun, and, like their elders, they needed the living Bread. We in England have much to do in

¹ See *Apostol. Constit.* (lib. viii. chap. xiii.)

² From "Dionysius:" see Seudamore's article.

recovering that lost privilege for our little ones. And Keble would have helped us, if he had been living still. (See his "Disuse of Infant Communion," in *Lyra Innocentium*.)

But the state of things with which we have actually to deal is very different. We begin with an early baptism, which is not now completed as it used to be by the bishop's "sealing," but is merely regarded as "a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness," without any prospective arming for the warfare which is to follow. Confirmation has been detached from Baptism, and is postponed till twelve years of age at the soonest, when it forms a sort of gate or porch to the sanctuary—an introduction to the first Eucharist, also delayed until childhood has almost passed into youth.

Now this makes a great difference in the relation of Penitence, both to Confirmation and to Holy Communion. It is hardly necessary to explain that the intention of the modern Church in postponing both of these has been to emphasise the personal responsibility of the communicant. All are not agreed as to the age when personal responsibility begins. Those who lay most stress on *education* will often fix it at fifteen: then, they say, a young Christian is fairly competent to "speak, understand, and think, as a man;" and not till then should he be promoted to full membership in the Church. Others maintain that children even of seven years of age will have experienced an awakening of conscience, and are capable of moral conduct.¹ But either way, the principle is the same. There is to be no communion before "years of discretion."

And what are "years of discretion?" The years which begin from the time when a soul first has its organs of spiritual perception trained to be able to discern good from evil.² When that stage has been reached, the door will be thrown open to full membership in the Church. But now it becomes at once evident that something else may be required before claiming the full Catholic inheritance. For directly moral choice is possible, sin is also possible; and even the sins

¹ See S. Aug. (*De Anima et ejus origine*, lib. i. cap. xii.): "Illius ætatis pueri et mentiri et verum loqui et confiteri et negare jam possunt." He alludes to Dinocrates, brother of the martyr Perpetua, who had died at the age of seven: (see Alban Butler). ² See Westcott on Heb. v. 14.

of children may have in them a malice which is deadly.¹ When a lie is told wilfully and wickedly by one child to hurt another, perhaps the evil intention is as real as when a grown man circulates slanders about his patron, or forges cheques against his estate. It will, therefore, happen that in the very hour when a Christian pastor should first have the joy of feeding a little flock of CHRIST'S lambs with the true Bread from heaven, one or more of these children will be in a state nearer to death than life eternal. Then the angel-guardian grieves but not despairs; and JESUS seeks the soul that He "suffered to come" to Him at the font, that He may find it again and bring it back in His arms; and the HOLY SPIRIT waits to return to what was His temple till so lately. Yet, for the present, there is a "sin unto death" between that child's soul and the heavenly feast. One sees at once, that what was said in former chapters about the treatment of grave sin must apply here. The little one cannot have wandered very far, but he has left his home, and must be restored by penitence—by confession and absolution. That is the regularly-appointed ministry through which JESUS seeks and saves, and the HOLY SPIRIT brings back the love of GOD. Restoration should be easy for a child so young, having such a short acquaintance with evil; but we have no warrant to excuse any from treading the prescribed path. Only those who repent and confess, whether they be old or young, can assure themselves that "the Blood of JESUS cleanseth them from all sin."²

Penitence has thus, in these latter days, come to be considered proper and wholesome before the first partaking of

¹ The author earnestly hopes not to be misunderstood. Like most missionaries, he has been forced to have sometimes experience of very youthful depravity. But he firmly believes in the holiness and righteousness of thousands of English homes. Many men's retrospect of childhood will have been as little shameful as that of Richard Baxter, whose worst failings were a little boyish conceit, rudeness to parents, and robbing orchards to gratify an immoderate appetite for fruit! (Yet this last offence was reckoned a *facinus* by S. Augustine; see his *Confessions*, bk. ii. chap. vi.)

² It is not meant here to go beyond what had been said before, but to insist that sacramental confession *may* be required for the young as much as for elders.

Holy Communion. And before Confirmation also ; since Confirmation is now so commonly regarded as the last step in preparation for the greater sacrament. The clergy find it highly expedient to bring their candidates to confession at this important stage. Here is an opportunity, the like of which can never occur again, for checking the young in tendencies, which, if encouraged, would soon be fraught with grave spiritual peril. So the clergy do their utmost to make confession customary for all who are to be brought to the bishop. There is, of course, a little danger in this—danger of unreality, if children are led to penitence before their consciences have begun to accuse of sin ; and a possible danger of suggesting evil to some “in whose spirit there is no guile.” On the whole, therefore, it is best that this should not be made an absolute rule. Let the priest use discrimination, and take advice of parents and teachers. But there is much to be said for, as well as against.

Two things have to be considered in speaking of the repentance of young persons not yet confirmed. The first is this : that the state to which the Church’s ministry restores them, repenting, is simply the baptismal condition : that, alone, being the degree of Christian fellowship to which they had attained, and from which they fell. Now, to have lost the fruits of the HOLY SPIRIT’S indwelling is, indeed, a terrible disgrace. “Infants just baptized are bright as the cherubim, as flames of fire rising heavenward in sacrifice to GOD.”¹ But although the light within be quenched for awhile when they sin, we must remember that they have not yet fully “tasted the good word of GOD, and the powers of the world to come.” Therefore, when they are being led back to the grace that they have forfeited, care should be taken not to alarm them unduly. A difference should always be made, and impressed upon their minds, between sins committed before, and after, the first Communion. There is not much of deep contriving where childish disobedience is concerned : the task is simple enough : forgiveness must generally be asked of parents or teachers to begin with ; and they, if they are Christians, can be best trusted to awaken sorrow for the transgression, without needless terrifying. The

¹ See Newman’s *Sermons*, vol. iii. serm. 18.

priest alone absolves ; but the greater part of the transaction will be under sanction of the Fifth Commandment.

Thus the youthful penitent returns to a holy childhood ; to the sacred obligation of the baptismal vow ; and to the same confidence as before in using the familiar accents of the LORD'S Prayer. But it is evident from the very fact of his fall, that baptismal grace will not suffice him very much longer. Even though he sinned as a little child, he showed that he had within him the germs of more masterful passions, and that the time was near when he must "put away childish things." Without delay, then, he must be invested with the armour of a Christian soldier ; and so proceed in due course from Confirmation to the Holy Eucharist itself. Now the expectation of a first Communion ought to affect the question of penitence quite as much as does the recollection of baptism. For already the soul is preparing for the most sacred and awful of all intercourse of man with his Maker. We must not, indeed, look to find "an old head on young shoulders ;" but when the object is to instil awe into this first approach to the Holy of holies, too much pains can hardly be taken. Not that the most earnest desire to make a first communion impressive will render previous confession *indispensable*, if there be no other reason for confessing. This is a relative, not an absolute necessity, of which the only test is the state of the conscience. In primitive times, so far as we know, all the faithful communicated weekly, children included ;¹ and sacramental confession was not practised, except for grievous crimes. And with us, too, one would say that the lambs of the flock are not to be forced through this gate indiscriminately, if they have not been found erring from the right path. But the question is now of those who *have* fallen—how to present them "holy and clean at the Heavenly Feast"—how to bring them to eat and drink with their Saviour, the King of kings.

¹ For this statement, the authorities quoted are the *Second Canon of the Council of Antioch*, A.D. 341, and the *Ninth Apostolical Canon*, which is thought to have been borrowed from Antioch. Compare the *Apostol. Constitutions*, book viii. chap. xii. (See also Smith and Cheetham's *Dict. of Christian Antiquities*, Art. "Holy Communion;" and Hefele's *Hist. of the Councils*, E.T. vol. i. p. 454 ; vol. ii. p. 67.)

We must think, then, of after-consequences; and the prospect does certainly add fresh importance to the seeking of pardon for past transgressions. Even under the old Covenant, sanctification of worshippers was held essential before partaking of the Paschal rites. It would be a terrible offence were any to approach wilfully impenitent to that solemn Memorial wherein CHRIST is still offered as slain, the true Paschal Lamb, for the sins of all of us. The very fact that we approach must mean, if it means anything, that we renounce for our own part the sins which crucified Him. Else we mock those sacred wounds, and that atoning Blood. Therefore all penitence, which has the Holy Eucharist for its motive, is as if one cried to GOD, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. . . . The sacrifice of GOD is a troubled spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O GOD, shalt Thou not despise. . . . Then shalt Thou be pleased with the Sacrifice of righteousness;" which I join in offering, by Thy command.

In the same way, the thought of being invited to feed on CHRIST, and to that mutual indwelling with Him, though it cannot make absolution necessary where there has not been deadly sin, is a reason for taking the utmost pains to recover purity if there has. At best, the language of Catholic piety will be, "LORD, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof." But when the LORD'S coming is to be *for the first time*, and the young heart should have been kept whole and untainted, "shining as in its angell-infancy!"¹ Will it not be worth while to use all diligence at once to restore the prospect of peace, aye, and of glory, to this fresh and vigorous soul, formed to inherit heaven? Surely, if ever there be repentance which causes joy among the angels of GOD, it is when that word *Absolvo* has cleared away the stain and brought back a lamb such as this to the safe fold? Think of the childish lips opened to receive that living Bread—the unspeakable riches of the Redeemer's love going with His gift of His own true Body! What may not be accomplished in an existence thus early devoted, early taken into the embrace of

¹ Henry Vaughan's *Silex Scintillans*: "The Retreat."

the LORD of life and death? And yet for the present all this is precluded: the evil that this child has done *must* be put away, before any good can follow. And to put that away is, even now, a great task, a mighty loosing. We can only come to Him—yes, for our most childish faults—who “hath left power to His Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in Him.”

Other bright expectations there are, which cluster round the first communion. Somewhat dimly perceived thus early, they are yet within range, and visible to the beginnings of faith. Such are the fruits of those great gifts of the HOLY GHOST, the possession of which makes life indeed worth living. Bestowed upon the young Christian at his anointing in Confirmation, these are to be constantly quickened, sustained, and increased by the sacramental feeding; since then, and only then,¹ do we have free access to the treasure of spiritual power abiding in the person of the risen LORD. “It was the good pleasure of the FATHER that in Him should all the fulness dwell”—words to be remembered in their bearing on a promise, scarcely to be appreciated without them, that “he that eateth of this Bread shall live for ever.” It is true that, when we ask for results within our cognisance, we may feel low-spirited at the little we can lay hold of. The “hidden leaven” baffles us by the obscurity of its process; the world “beholdeth not, neither knoweth” the indwelling Comforter. And yet perhaps the tokens of grace are more visible, on the whole, in early years, than under the universal sameness of middle age. A true-hearted elder sister, a boy fighting hard for the right “among lions” at a public school—these are quickly seen to be under guidance from the Spirit of GOD. The LORD is with His young communicants, and leads them on, and works with them, and makes “the rough places plain.”

But if blessings like these are to flow from the first Eucharist,

¹ Only then, inasmuch as that is the royal road—the “living way” which He made to be a new access for us “through the veil, that is, His Flesh.” But we do not disparage acts of spiritual communion. The Fathers explain both S. John vi. and xv. broadly, of a participation of CHRIST by the faithful, without particularly specifying the Blessed Sacrament.

it is evident that the youthful guest must have laid aside any weight of sin that held him down. For the course before him is almost like Isaiah's "mounting up with wings as eagles." It is immense freedom: it is to be a prince in his FATHER'S house: it is the early stage of what S. Paul calls "the liberty of the glory of the children of GOD." And so here, again, we see how a necessity may exist for Absolution; not merely to cleanse, but to untie the constraining bonds of sin; that each young communicant may know and embrace—what so few, alas! really comprehend—our full liberty in the Gospel of CHRIST.

How natural, how congenial to a happy childlike character, is this freedom of soul! How almost impossible to attain, for those who have dwelt long in the dark prison-house! Who would not make the most of that "accepted time," when perhaps the only hindrance is a sin which dates from yesterday? For our children, one half protests against the sadness of Keble's thought, when he pictures them as struggling up to the brilliant palace of the king—

"Round many a nook of deepest gloom,
Up many a broken wearying stair."

And yet it is well that all who love those children should feel that—

"The handmaid Penance hath been there,
And swept and garnished all the place."¹

Then, with confidence, may we add our petition, "Ut veniens Dominus noster Jesus Christus . . . paratam sibi in illis inveniat mansionem."²

On the whole, one regards absolution for the young with peculiar thankfulness, because the chains to be broken then are light, and the knots not greatly tangled: because the deliverance is full and free, and the future rich in promise. Precious time has indeed been wasted; yet, still, the labourer returns to the vineyard in the morning coolness, under light of the rising sun.

¹ Keble, *Lyra Innocentium*: "Disuse of Infant Communion."

² From the *Præparatio ad Missam* (Roman).

Next we must look on to a later stage of Christian service. We dare not say that the communicant's absolution will then have less effect than it possessed at the beginning ; or that confession may be abandoned at the advance of riper years. There is no limitation of age for those to whom the Church's invitation is issued. Seniors, who are about to fulfil the Easter duty, may still do well to "open their grief" beforehand to a "discreet and learned minister of GOD'S word." When thoughtful men and women lay their burden down before the Cross, they have reason to know how heavy that burden is ; and their thankfulness, and deep sense of relief, are proportionate. So too their burnt-offering, their dedication of "themselves, their souls and bodies," is more a "reasonable service" than a little child's could ever be. But, comparisons apart, the relation of Absolution to the Eucharist can never be altered in essentials. If a soul has been bound, through its own fault, in the chains of sin, it cannot approach the Royal Feast till it is loosed, and the right way to loose it is by sacramental absolution. This may happen a hundred times in a lifetime. We are content in these days to share the reproach of laxness with S. Chrysostom, rather than revive the harshness of ante-Nicene discipline. None are excluded now from penitence except by their own obstinacy. On the other hand, none are required to use this preparation if they are not tied and bound. That was the rule for the little child : it is the same for the grey-haired man.

However, in the experience of many of the humblest and holiest Christians, the use of penitence becomes certainly more indispensable as they proceed on life's journey. Its frequency, of course, must depend on the opportunities they have, both for that and for Communion itself. But so long as they are communicants at GOD'S altar, they never ask themselves the question whether there is another alternative besides confession. We can do no good by exaggeration here (as was fully allowed in a former chapter). But it is not exaggeration, when a soul deeply penetrated with sorrow for love of GOD reckons, as grievous, things of its own doing which, to a less earnest spirit, would occasion no regret at all. S. Chrysostom, in commenting on the Beatitudes, notes a difference between virtues exercised in timid

moderation, and the saintly standard, exceeding great and high.¹ And he instances the second Beatitude:—Saints do not merely sorrow, but *mourn*, for their sins. Such mourners will ever be moved to seek their “comfort” through the word of pardon spoken in CHRIST’S Name. But although careful to do this, they are not restrained by fear from approaching afterwards to feed on the LORD’S Body. Such fear as they have is GOD’S “punishment;”² but “what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” Rather, each communion brings them nearer to a state of “perfect love,” from which fear is cast out. For their life is now, more and more, “hid with CHRIST in GOD;” and that which is of CHRIST within them has found a home there so long, that they can scarce conceive the possibility of their losing Him again. “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me, and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My Hand.”

Then, farther, as the celestial food of the Eucharist has been at all times given to support the Christian on his road to heaven; so, more particularly, should it be desired at the hour of death; when the spirit is about to return, disembodied, to the GOD who gave it. No other stay but this remains: none of the living can accompany the dead in that awful flight: only if united³ to an all-merciful Saviour who never dies, may one pass the dread gulf in safety. Thus the last communion of the dying has received its name of *viaticum*; and one might almost fancy the angel-guardian standing by, entreating with deeper significance than to the prophet of old, “Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for thee!”

But then, there must be a corresponding solemnity about the last absolution. The confession, indeed, uttered under great bodily weakness, cannot enter much into details; but yet it is the final outpouring of contrition for the unworthiness of a life-

¹ See S. Chrysostom (*in S. Matt. Hom. xv.*): ὁ μὲν συμμέτρως, ὁ δὲ μεθ' ὑπερβολῆς ἀπάσης.

² See 1 S. John iv. 18; where our Revisers have done well to translate κολασιν by “punishment,” instead of “torment.”

³ Communion is more than μετοχή: it is συνάφεια. (See S. Chrysostom on 1 Cor. x. 16.)

time ; and the pardon which it obtains is to remove the last weight which could depress the emancipated spirit, uprising to meet its LORD. Does it often fail to obtain that last acceptance which it craves ? Surely not. Jeremy Taylor, indeed, warns us that "sickness is not a fit station for a penitent ;"¹ and the insecurity of a death-bed conversion has become proverbial. Yet he allows that such patience and contempt of the world as are to be learned in sickness may dispose one admirably to receive the Divine favour ; and moreover that the occurrence of sickness is in itself, as it were, an invitation to humble oneself under the mighty Hand of GOD. So that wherever a man has lived well before this comes to him, one may hope that his last confession, feeble and scanty as it sounds, may be the expression of a deeper and more fervent love, and a more absolute sincerity, than any that went before.

With the words of pardon, and the *Viaticum*, a departing soul has all that is most essential :—"Convertere, anima mea, in requiem tuam, quia Dominus benefecit tibi ; quia eripuit animam meam de morte, oculos meos a lacrymis, pedes meos a lapsu. Placebo Domino in regione vivorum." Those are the two things, possessing which, we need not fear to conclude our warfare in the Church militant.

The last Unction is far less important. Yet it has long occupied a certain recognised place in the penitential system, and should not be ignored.

In the well-known passage from S. James, a two-fold object is proposed. The Church would procure health both for the body and for the soul of the sick person. The idea of obtaining *physical* relief by "prayer-oil"² implies that the patient is *in extremis* ; because the relief is evidently a boon extraordinary. "Luke the beloved physician" would not have approved of setting aside regular scientific treatment, until medical skill had done its best, and had failed. This is quite clear : and we should therefore expect that the spiritual healing would also be subsidiary to other regular ministrations. Another thing to

¹ See Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Dying*, sect. vi. ("Advantages of Sickness").

² Prayer-oil is the Eastern name for the fifth of the seven "Mysteries of the Holy Church."

observe is that this must always have been distinct from Absolution. S. Chrysostom may perhaps have thought otherwise,¹ (though συγχωρεῖν has not exactly the same meaning as ἀφίεναι), but the more natural construction is to keep it separate. Unction is a separate transaction—there are to be two elders present, or more, who having anointed the sick, pray for him, soul and body together; and the double result follows: “the LORD shall raise him up, and if he have committed sins, it shall be forgiven him.” The prayers in the Liturgy of Serapion, and in that of the eighth book of the *Apostolical Constitutions*, have the same two-fold end in view. They recognise the great danger which threatens the dying from Satan’s assaults, and intreat that the oil may be a protection against evil spirits, and a medicine of life and salvation.² Like S. James, they set the bodily cure before the spiritual; which was natural in early times, when healing of wounds on a large scale was expected to follow from the use of consecrated oil.³ But the other, greater object is plainly included too. And one can see how inevitable it was that in course of time⁴ the position of these two should be reversed, and health of soul come to be almost the only thing contemplated. It is hardly necessary to consult history for this: one feels that so it must have been. *Miracles* of healing were indeed thought credible, up to the twelfth century and later; but records of cures wrought by regular ministrations in the Church would not often be forthcoming. The Church had to face this difficulty, that “the prayer of faith” now very rarely

¹ See S. Chrys. (*De Sacerdot.* lib. iii. 6): [οἱ ἱερεῖς] συγχωρεῖν ἔχουσιν ἐξουσίαν ἀμαρτημάτων. ἀσθενεῖ γάρ τις, φησὶν, ἐν ὑμῖν; κ.τ.λ.

² See the *Liturgy of Serapion*, iv. 17; *Apostol. Constit.* viii. 29. (It is well that we have these early notices of sacramental unction, and one still earlier from *The Testament of the Lord*, to add to the somewhat uncertain and disputable authority of the Epistle to Decentius.)

³ See S. Jerome’s *Life of S. Hilarion the Hermit*, chap. xxxii. and xlv. Possibly oil, even unblessed, was considered a specific for healing wounds, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan. A curious instance of another sort is that of Venantius Fortunatus (sixth cent.), who was thought to have cured himself of blindness by applying oil from a lamp at S. Martin’s altar. (See Smith’s *Dict. Chr. Biography*.)

⁴ Father Puller, in his researches into this subject, has found proofs that, by the eighth century, both in East and West, Unction had begun to be considered a sacrament of spiritual health for the dying.

“saved the sick” from a fatal termination to his sickness, though the oil had not been forgotten. But then, might not the other, the greater healing, be hoped for still? Though the angel of death must come at GOD’S appointed hour, was there any reason why the spirits of evil should not be repulsed? Could it be thought that the spiritual blessing was evacuated through absence of good physical conditions? As well might one argue that ab-solution was bound to fail, unless palsied bodies were brought together with diseased souls to Him who “hath power on earth to forgive sins.” Thus a sacramental use of Extreme Unction became by degrees established, in the shape now familiar to most Catholic countries. The course of a fatal malady would generally not be arrested; but the soul might be held up in its last weakness: not “suffered, for any pains of death, to fall from GOD.” Indeed, the last Unction would come to be regarded almost as a second Confirmation: a heavenly “love, joy, and peace,” succeeded to the cruel work of the tempter; and the oil was “oil of gladness,” cheering the dying Christian till “the days of his mourning were ended.”¹ (Thus the 1549 Prayer Book mentions particularly “comfort, relief, and gladness.”)

This use of Unction is not likely ever to become popular. The modern fancies about “faith-healing” are all concerned with physical ailments. And, certainly, the oil may be tried for that, when other means have failed.² But such a resource can scarcely have been intended for these times, so much as those for which S. James wrote. We should think, rather, that medical skill and good nursing have been prospered by the HOLY SPIRIT, to bring them to their present perfection for our benefit; and our first duty is to be thankful for the prospect of hope which those provide. “Give place to the physician, for the LORD hath created him: let him not go from thee, for thou hast need of him. There is a time when in their hands there is good success. For they shall also pray unto the

¹ The prayer in *Apost. Const.* viii. 20 runs, Θεός ὁ δούς . . . ἔλαιον τοῦ ἰλαρῆναι πρόσωπον εἰς ἀγαλλίαμα εὐφροσύνης.

² The author has had opportunities of seeing, in one case, relief from pain, and in another complete recovery ensue from the application of hallowed oil. In the former instance the relief was very striking, though not continued for many hours.

LORD, that He would prosper that which they give for ease and remedy to prolong life." The Unction of the sick may still be medicinal, if GOD wills; but its proper purpose is not to supplant the physician. Its proper purpose is to fortify souls against the pains of death, by special sacramental grace.

One must admit that that prophylactic intention is simpler to understand than another, which remains to be mentioned. The last Unction is also proposed to our notice as retrospective and penitential. The apostle S. James says nothing about cheering and gladdening the soul.¹ We are left to infer, that, when the devil is driven back, joy will return with the presence of the Blessed Comforter; or to believe this from the symbolical meaning attached to anointing, in the Old Testament. But what S. James does say is that "[even] if he have committed sins," he shall have forgiveness. Here is a difficulty, in connection with sacramental penitence. For, if the dying have committed any grievous sins, and are not absolved, how can "prayer-oil" bring about their pardon? If they have received absolution and the *Viaticum*, what sins can remain, for which they need forgiveness? Roman Catholic divines reply, that there is still a *residuum* of evil, which they term *fomes peccati*, which the Church's charity would remove before the last breath is breathed. Or, sometimes, they say that this sacrament purges the organs of sense, which will have been so often, during the lifetime, avenues of temptation. Sometimes they speak of venial faults which the Absolution left, which dealt only with the greater: sometimes they allude to a languor and infirmity which remain as after-consequences of the sins actually forgiven. None of these explanations seems quite to correspond to the language used, *καὶν ἁμαρτίας ἢ πεποιηκώς, ἀφελήσεται αὐτῷ*. But perhaps we can find no better solution. What is easy to understand is, that the Church's loving offices must follow her children to the very end, and that prayers ought not to be slack even after Holy Communion, because the soul's trial cannot be completed until the moment of dissolution. Thus, in the hour of extremest weak-

¹ For (as Father Puller shows) the words *σώσει* and *ἐγερει* must apply to the *body*.

ness, when neither words nor thoughts are well under control, the Church takes the poor exhausted frame, soothes and blesses its helplessness, and consigns it once more to a "mercy that is greater than the heavens."

Can there be penitence after death? Perfect souls may still have contrition, when they wear their robes "made white in the blood of the Lamb," and remember what it cost to redeem them and bring them to Paradise. Or again, they may be accounted penitents in respect of the fervent intercessions whereby they contribute to the deliverance of "the whole Church militant" from her burden of sin and shame. A larger question is as regards the multitude of imperfect souls, reconciled but not fully cleansed, before they quitted their corruptible bodies.¹ These indeed cannot now "work out their own salvation," any more than they can "shrink back unto perdition;" yet one would think that they must pass their time of longing expectation in a state between joy and sorrow, and that there remains some degree of pain in the recollection of their great coldness, and many wasted opportunities. Moreover, S. Augustine speaks as if some of those who "having been regenerated in CHRIST, did not spend their lives either well or very wickedly," would be saved through the compassionate prayers of saints, living or departed;² and surely such charity, bestowed on those thus helplessly waiting,³ must tend to a very deep consciousness of personal demerit in the recipients. And yet we know very little, that we can be sure of. Even the most imperfect, if they sought the LORD in time, are saved: they are in peaceful possession of an eternal security: they are with CHRIST, and in

¹ It is noteworthy, that the Revisers of 1661 made amends for the neglect of a hundred years, by introducing a form of Commendation of the soul, which fully recognises the need of cleansing when life's trial is ended. (See Visitation Office.)

² See S. Aug. (*De Civ. Dei*. lib. xxi. cap. xxiv.).

³ Some have pictured the departed as longing to succour the distressed on earth, and full of grief because they could not—could not, because, as S. Bernard says, "*Corpus necessarium est ad agendam pœnitentiam.*" (See, for instance, Dickens' *Christmas Carol*.) This need not affect the question of *prayers* for others offered out of the body, even by imperfect souls. (See Mr. Stone's *Outlines of Christian Dogma*, p. 263).

Him they live. It is not easy to conceive a state of punishment for such, even though they were "prisoners of hope." When Dante ascended the slopes of his purgatorial mountain, he met sometimes with those who sang a plaintive *Miserere*: but he came also where the air was ringing with the triumph of the *Te Deum*.

CHAPTER XIII.

Conversion.

THE Church's system of Penitence has now been followed to the end: but its relation to Conversion has still to be considered, and is of great importance. What ideas of inward change does this word convey to our apprehension? I shall endeavour to explain, first, the right meaning of conversion, and its proper place in Catholic belief and practice. Next, to draw a dividing line between this and a "notional" conversion incompatible with honest repentance. And lastly, to show how the genuine conversion is in perfect accord with a reverent use of sacraments, and the inseparable companion of contrition, confession, and satisfaction.

Some will tell us that a "healthy" mind needs no conversion: that, whenever such cravings are manifested, they are most probably neurotic, or developed from some form of hereditary disease. We may leave that for physiologists to decide if they can. We are on much safer ground when we state Catholic doctrine, than we should be if we discussed varieties of constitution and temperament.

I. The true significance of the word is simple enough. *Conversio ad Deum*. The supreme and sovereign will of GOD must be obeyed, sooner or later, by all His intelligent creatures. By the angels, holy and elect, a perfect response has been made from the beginning. These "excel in strength," because they "hearken unto the voice of His word," always beholding His Face. Evil spirits, on the contrary, are rebels against GOD; but His strong "chains" restrain them even now, and at the last Day their captivity will be made absolute and unchange-

able. Between angel and devil stands man, having that probation still to undergo which in their case has been longtime decided. For although, at last, man must needs "fall into the hands of the living GOD," before whom none may "stand when He appeareth" for judgment; yet in this life every human being has the responsibility of choosing, or rejecting, the service of his Maker. By conversion, then, is meant the act of a soul freely choosing to live for, and to love, GOD above all things. The instance of S. Peter is perhaps the very best that can be found in the Bible. JESUS saith, "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me?" When Simon Peter heard that, he knew and recognised the voice of Him whom he had confessed as GOD incarnate: here was his true and only GOD claiming the whole affection of his heart. And his answer, "LORD, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee," could have meant no less, than that the great apostle was now "converted,"^{*} and fit to "strengthen his brethren," as JESUS had said that he should. It is essential that love should go with conversion. A converted soul does not merely abase itself before an infinite and Almighty Ruler whom it feels unable to resist. Rather it is moved by the attraction of Divine love to a devotion which is spontaneous—a "whole burnt-offering." Hence the knowledge of GOD must come first. GOD speaks to the soul, and then the soul hearkens, and "turns to see the Voice which speaks with it." As it turns, it is drawn by that eternal beauty, transfigured by the glory of that love; so that the will becomes fixed in a resolve to follow and serve GOD "all the days, even to the end."

Now, this being a great and serious choice, many have supposed that it requires the strength of the full-grown to make it. Yet can we be right to exclude those of tender years? Not if we remember the child Samuel, or the great forerunner, "filled with the HOLY GHOST even from his mother's womb." And surely, if sins begin, for so many children, with their attaining years of discretion (as we saw in Chap. xii.), the

^{*} The word (in S. Luke xxii. 32) is *ἐπιστρέψας*: "when thou hast turned again," R.V. On the numerous passages where *ἐπιστρέφειν* occurs, see Dr. Mason's *Ministry of Conversion*, p. 2.

choice of holiness must be open to them quite as soon. All one can say is that, at all ages, the more any human being knows of GOD—not by “serene philosophy,”¹ but by the earnest search of a soul looking up from the troubled sea of pitiless moral evil—the stronger will be his impulse of love to Godward. Whereas, without knowledge, it is hardly possible that he can love sincerely. Christian children therefore may, and do sometimes, repeat the experience of Samuel; while still, the more usual order is for the fifth commandment to be embraced before the first—parents indeed training their children for GOD, yet of necessity drawing to themselves the regard which their little ones cannot lift so high as to the great Unseen.

In one way it is possible that the very young have an advantage. “Except ye turn, and become as little children,” is certainly not to be understood as if childish ignorance could be the chief factor in conversion. What it does mean is, that our obedience to Him who calls us should be entirely humble and simple; and this in old age as truly as in childhood. But then we find ourselves asking, Are humility and simplicity quite so congenial to old age, as to childhood?

Let us observe also that, while a choice between good and evil is imperative, a converted person is not of necessity one who has been a great sinner. His turning is not obliged to be returning.² The paths which he avoids he may never have trodden. Though not entirely blameless, he has not left his heavenly citizenship, to wander away into a far country. If so, then, again, the young may be better disposed than their elders, for offering their whole heart to GOD; because the young are less likely to have to retrace their steps before they come to His presence. There must be cases in which baptismal grace has met with so little resistance, that these true children of GOD “obey” their FATHER in heaven “as soon as they hear of Him.” Then, conversion is like the opening of a flower-bud to the morning sun: you would say that the trial in renouncing evil was scarcely felt to be a trial at all. “LORD, to whom

¹ See Isaac Williams' sonnet on Origen, in the *Lyra Apostolica*.

² Compare *ἐὰν μὴ στραφῇτε* (S. Matt. xviii. 3) with *ἐπέστρεψα βλέπειν τὴν φωτὴν* (Rev. i. 12).

shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." "In Origen," says Bishop Westcott, "we have the first record of a Christian boyhood, and he was great from the cradle. As a child he entered into the study of Scripture with eager devotion. . . . His father silently thanked GOD for the promise which he gave for the future."¹ S. Vincent of Paul, keeping his father's sheep when a child, had a hollow oak for shelter, where he arranged for himself a little oratory, and spent much time in prayer.² We English are, perhaps rightly, suspicious of precocious piety. We say that even baptized children will at times yield to that *phronema sarkos* which is "not subject to the Law of GOD." Thus, we were brought up from the first to expect to have to resist desires conflicting with the will of GOD. We were taught, among the earliest lessons of all, to "renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the carnal desires of the flesh." And yet, when we think of the holy and healthful influences which have centered in numberless Christian homes, can we doubt that many of their inmates, women especially, have grown up for GOD from the very first, in heart and mind?

The word conversion is not entirely applicable to such as these; because to *turn* to GOD may seem to imply that the face had previously been set in another direction, away from Him. But if the child-saints have no need to turn, there must at all events be a day when they awake and rise up to the love of GOD—a day in which they first exert their wills in conscious response to their baptismal calling. So that, even for them, one must speak of a vital change, the passage from a "spirit sealed by slumber"³ to consciousness of life in the HOLY GHOST. It is very important to have right notions about this. Some eager advocates of baptismal regeneration have allowed

¹ From Westcott's article "Origenes," in the *Dictionary of Christian Biography* (Smith and Wace).

² See *Life of S. Vincent de Paul*, by Mrs. R. F. Wilson, p. 8.

³ The expression is Wordsworth's, and although he was writing on the heaviness of grief, the words are not inappropriate to the half-wakened apprehension of a child.

little or no play to the moral choice in childhood. Others, equally enthusiastic for conversion, have almost persuaded themselves that there is no such thing as a childhood sanctified.

These might have learned better from S. John :—" I have written unto you, little children,¹ because ye know the FATHER," but the other error is to be avoided also, and it is one to which High Churchmen have been not a little liable.

Very beautiful is the early self-devotion of a young Christian, who simply follows " the only GOD." Surely, among the " great cloud of witnesses " unseen, who " compass him about," there are saints and angels who pray with full assurance of hope, Arise, shine, O happy one, for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee!

But hopeful too are the grave conversions of older penitents; though they, after long years spent in sin, bring what only infinite mercy could deign to accept. As we quoted from S. Jerome in a former chapter, " There is no sin so grievous that GOD will not heal it, except that which despairs of His healing." And therefore there is always hope for those who turn. Now, indeed, the effort of will has to be greater than in the case of those whom we thought of a little while ago. S. Augustine has described, from his own experience, the tremendous hold that evil habits have, if long indulged in.² That is not apparent in the parable of the prodigal son, where all the pleasure in wickedness is shown to be at an end, leaving only a slave's portion, and famine. But in real life the conflict often goes on, just as in the seventh chapter of Romans: the will, that has yielded so many times, still longing for what the conscience wholly condemns. Added to which there is, commonly, either a dread of GOD'S anger, or, at least, much habitual distrust of self. Once, that might have been a safeguard: now, it is only suggestive of despair, and makes any

¹ *παῖδια* (not *τεκνία* as before.) He seems to mean those actually children, distinguishing them from *πατέρες* and *νεανίσκοι*, to be mentioned soon after.

² *Confess.* viii. chap. v. See also S. Bernard (*De Convers. ad Cleric.* cap. vi.): " Dum suis quibusque membris in hunc modum leges promulgat . . . interrumpunt subito vocem jubentis, et uno impetu clamant, unde hæc nova religio ? "

improvement appear impossible. When, then, all these obstacles have been overcome through the strength of a soul's longing to recover a heavenly FATHER'S love, one can well understand that there is joy among the angels. The pilgrim has regained the heavenward road, only to find a steep crag frowning down upon him, which he must climb with weary and bleeding feet; and yet he is not discouraged. The sailor resumes his voyage, though beyond the harbour's mouth he can see the white crests of waves, and hears their threatening roar. If "the way of transgressors is hard,"¹ their conversion also is hard, at the beginning. What nerves them to the task is their simple faith in CHRIST their Mediator and Advocate. Thousands fall beside them—often after struggling forward for a little way—but the converted press on over every barrier, because they love GOD.

The true conversion, as we must not forget, is that which contemplates a definite work to be done for GOD. "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not, to observe Thy Commandments." One after another, the old temptations are to be met and conquered. Satan is to be cast out by prayer and fasting. Instead of pride, wrath, and covetousness, the awakened heart is to be ruled by love, joy, peace. Wasted hours are to be redeemed: the service which dates from the eleventh hour must be unsparing of self.² All these difficulties are freely embraced, by one who believes that GOD'S goodness calls him, and GOD'S grace is sufficient for him. But we must remember, also, that acceptance of such a plan of entire reformation will be gradual, for this reason, that what lies before a penitent and faithful soul is never revealed except by slow degrees. How little of the future did our LORD make plain to S. Peter! "It is not for you to know." "Whither I go, thou canst not follow Me now, but thou shalt follow Me afterwards." "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." So, at the first moment of conversion, the awakened spirit realises, indeed, always some one well-marked step, the beginning of its turning to GOD; but there is much beyond, which it cannot

¹ Prov. xiii. 15.

² See S. Bernard, *De Convers. ad Cleric.* cap. xi.

bear to contemplate as yet. And as each fresh point of duty is perceived, there must always be a fresh movement of the will, consenting to what is required. This is to go "from strength to strength." It has been compared to mountain travelling, in which lower ranges show themselves first, and then, when these have been surmounted, higher peaks behind, up to the summit. George Herbert has this idea :—

"At length I got unto the gladsome hill,
Where lay my hope,
Where lay my heart ; and climbing still,
When I had gain'd the brow and top,
A lake of brackish waters on the ground
Was all I found.

“ With that abash'd, and struck with many a sting
Of swarming fears,
I fell, and cry'd, Alas, my king ;
Can both the way and end be tears ?
Yet taking heart I rose, and then perceiv'd
I was deceiv'd :

"My bill was further," etc.

(The Pilgrimage.)

Indeed, "the path of the righteous is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day:" but it is an uphill path, not to be trodden without unceasing and increasing effort. We shall see as we go on how important it is to remember this. When the Fathers tell us that the conversion of dying persons is to be reckoned not by length of time but by their minds' degree of preparedness for the last account,¹ it is obvious that they speak of exceptions to the general rule. GOD does not require the impossible, and so the ordinary test is dispensed with, for those who have but few hours to live. But in all ordinary cases, the surrender of self is attainable only by a gradual process, and after long persistence.

So also in looking forward, for few years or many, we cannot without rashness assert that there will never be a going back from the decision once made. We are told that we "have need of patience, that, having done the will of GOD, we may receive the promise." Otherwise we may "shrink back," even

¹ See, for instance, S. Aug. *Ep.* ccxxviii; and *Enchirid.* lxxv.

"unto perdition." Most commonly, however, what happens is a temporary loss of that eager and warm affection, by which the soul was first moved in its impulse towards GOD. "I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love." Often and often there will be a re-kindling of the flame, and the once wavering spirit will be more blessed in the latter end than in the beginning of its trial. But it would be vain to pretend that those who have chosen a Christian course never flag in after years,¹ nor refuse their daily burden of duty. "Not every one that saith unto Me, LORD, LORD," (as many do, sincerely, at their first conversion,) "shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of My FATHER which is in heaven;" which, however, cannot be known till he has run his course to the end, and, perhaps, renewed his repentance many times.²

Yet those are not far from the truth who maintain that, when any man has found grace to "turn to the LORD with all his heart,"³ he may be expected not again to stand in need of the same thorough inward change. The GOD whom Christians serve by a free choice is able, says S. Jude, to "keep them from falling," (nay, even to "guard them from stumbling," if we accept the Revised Version). If they still fail, He is most willing both to pardon, and to renew their strength. But this would not be the safest way for them, because, although GOD were willing, their own wills would be weaker after each lapse. In point of fact, they are not bound to fail: they may have no serious lapse. Very often, at least, they will go forward bravely in spite of constant infirmities, "believe to the saving of the soul," and continue justified by their faith.⁴ For them, the

¹ 1 S. John ii. 19 is not to the point. S. John is speaking there of false apostles, whose separation from the Church could only be a question of time; whereas, if they had been honest, they would have remained. There is no reference to the general question of sinning after conversion.

² Let it be observed that this is not saying that there cannot be assurance of forgiveness to the penitent after absolution, rightly ministered, and received with faith and contrition.

³ Joel ii. 12.

⁴ So S. Augustine (*Prop. ad Rom. xviii.*):—"Gratia vero efficit, ut non tantum velimus recte facere, sed etiam possimus; non viribus nostris, sed Liberatoris auxilio, qui nobis etiam perfectam pacem in resurrectione tribuat; quæ pax perfecta bonam voluntatem consequitur."

grand turning-point was once for all, when they made their offering of repentance such as "bringeth no regret."

It has been a question much debated, whether one who loves GOD can be *assured* that he shall always enjoy GOD'S love. One has heard very urgent pleading that, unless we are firmly persuaded of that, we cannot have the trustful affection which alone is worthy of the family of GOD. But, although "the Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are GOD'S children," this is the consequence of a Divine leading, and not an irreversible privilege. Conversion is indeed in many cases the hinge on which everything will turn in time to come; but that is different from a man's pretending to know, by some inward feeling, that he, personally, is saved for evermore. It is true that New Testament writers speak of a "calling and election made sure," and a "full assurance of hope unto the end." But these are not mentioned as being a present possession, but as blessings to be sought after with much care and diligence. The utmost one can say is, that those who have walked long with GOD enjoy a familiarity with Him by faith, which increases year by year; and which, at last, they could hardly break off if they would. The "hope set before them" becomes then, in very deed, "an anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast, and entering into that which is within the veil."¹ Yet even the most glorious saints have feared lest they should be castaways; and, "while some suffer great temptations in the beginning of their conversion, others," without doubt, "do so in the latter end."² The danger is not in GOD'S love, which never fails; but in the "unruly wills and affections of sinful men."

On the whole, no one has treated the question of assurance better than Thomas à Kempis:—"When one that was in anxiety of mind, often wavering between fear and hope, did once, being oppressed with grief, humbly prostrate himself in a church before the altar in prayer, and said within himself,

¹ One could envy the confidence of the pious Calvinist who said, "I seem to myself to have been crossing one of these Highland lochs of ours by night; and am now so far across, that I can count all the lights on the opposite shore."

² *Imitation of Christ*, book i. chap. xiii.

O if I knew that I should yet persevere! he presently heard within him an answer from GOD, which said, What if thou didst know it, what wouldst thou do? Do now what thou wouldst do then, and thou shalt be secure."¹

II. In our own country, the doctrine of conversion has been most popular with Methodists. But, as John Wesley derived it from the Moravians, and the Moravians took most of their telling of it from Luther, we shall be right if we, too, trace its descent from the famous champion of Wittenberg. In doing which, we shall easily perceive how it came to be exaggerated and abused. Luther was no mere turbulent heresiarch.² He began by forming high ideals of what a Christian's religion should be; and it was not altogether his fault that these were frustrated in practice. His notion of GOD, as "an inexorable Judge demanding obedience to an impossible law,"³ was really the notion commonly received in his day. Some of the mystics might know better; but, in the world at large, a righteous conversation was supposed unattainable; and men were to compound for their lax and vicious habits by purchasing pardons or indulgences. To that way of escape, neither Luther's arrogant temper would submit, nor his real religious earnestness; but his quarrel with Tetzels helped him not a whit to fulfil the Divine requirements. Thus it was that he came to apprehend the doctrine of imputed righteousness, as a new solution of the difficulty. The doctrine itself was neither new nor objectionable. S. Bernard himself had taught that man can do no good work, nor merit eternal life by any works of his, but all is of GOD'S free grace: that the evil that man has done, cannot be undone, yet may be as though it had not been, if GOD does not lay it to his charge.⁴ Now, "not to impute sin" hardly differs at all from Luther's tenet of an imputed righteousness, with which GOD covers our sins.⁵

¹ *Imitation of Christ*, book i. chap. xxv.

² One cannot but respect the man who called the Athanasian Creed the *propugnaculum* of the Catholic Faith. (See note in *Waterland*, vol. iv. p. 301.)

³ Creighton's *History of the Papacy*, vol. v. chap. iii.

⁴ S. Bernard, Sermon i. in *Annunc. B.V.M.*

⁵ See, of course, Ps. xxxii. 1.

However, there was decided novelty in the doctrine as by him presented. All Catholic writers would have proceeded to show how, when CHRIST had first paid our debt, He took us into living union with Himself by our baptism; how, by the new nature therein conferred, our spiritual faculties were consecrated to a real participation in His holiness, and an ultimate victory over sin; and how, "where the Spirit of the LORD is, there is liberty." Luther, on the contrary, who never rid himself of what "the traditional teaching and example of the Middle Ages had taught him of the unbending necessities of Divine justice,"¹ could not comprehend the happy self-conquest of a saint, nor the possibilities of human improvement under GOD'S transforming grace. He refused peace of mind through indulgences, but his only alternative was to believe that GOD would not look at his sins. He was "not under the law," because CHRIST'S Death had "redeemed him from the curse of the law." There was nothing to *do*: only to *believe* in this great and merciful substitution of CHRIST for the sinner. That was the full and sufficient meaning of S. Paul's famous saying, that "the just shall live by faith."

Of Lutheranism as a system one must not judge by looking either at the character of its founder—forceful and devout though ill-balanced—or at those wise and learned divines who, in later times, have done so much for good morals² as well as for the elucidation of Holy Scripture. Our present subject is conversion; and there can be no doubt that conversion has suffered injury from its Lutheran rehandling. Instead of honest efforts to do right, the tendency has been to content oneself with an inward persuasion of security through reliance on the substituted merits of CHRIST—on feelings or convictions, that is, in place of obedience. Together with this, much vagueness in the conception of sin and repentance. One might be surprised at that, reading as one does in the first of the Theses of Wittenberg, that "Our LORD and Master . . . intended the whole life of believers to be penitence." But a

¹ Dean Wace's *Essay on Luther's Life and Teaching* (Luther's *Primary Works*, p. 428).

² As, for instance, Bishop Martensen.

little further acquaintance with Luther's style shows his intention to have been wholly different from that of Catholic writers. By "penitence" he meant a settled conviction of the abiding sinfulness of the human heart before GOD. Such sinfulness he taught his disciples to think unremovable, whether by pardons of man's devising, or by prayers, fasts, religious exercises of any kind. It is true that, against sin, he would always set the imputed righteousness of CHRIST. Still, sin was a *state* in which all must remain to the end of their days. Enumeration of sins, or distinctions between greater and less, the German Reformers abhorred. The condition of fallen man was alone to be deplored, and this was shared by all alike.

One can imagine the mischief that might result from such teaching as this. In point of fact, the best Lutherans have read their Bibles too diligently to allow themselves in immorality; and possess quite enough good sense to admit that their founder's intentions were sometimes more commendable than his arguments. Yet it is to be feared that mischief *has* been done. There is a lax way of living which confronts us now and then, combined with the utmost self-satisfaction, and a measure of spiritual pride. That owes its origin to the men who once made conversion a justification through the feelings.¹

Another consequence has been to press for sudden conversions. Those are always the most striking, and signal as examples to others; and why should men waste time over a change which is merely of conviction—an acceptance of established facts?

Lastly, conversion has, under this treatment come to be considered as apart from, almost hostile to, the sacramental system. Not that Luther himself wished to disparage Baptism and Holy Communion (even Penitence he allowed to hold its place); but he rarely spoke of these as if they had anything to do with producing, or sustaining, that new life which is of faith. Sacraments were to be observed because of CHRIST'S command; but the universal *nostrum*, "Only believe," was quite

¹ It is fair to admit that no such formula was in use among Luther's friends; but *practical* amendment was certainly not their *forte*.

independent of the blessings associated with altar and font. And that was what became the popular religion of Protestants.

The other great Reformed system, Calvinism, has so lost its hold upon our countrymen (even north of the Tweed), that very little space need be allotted to it in this chapter. Indeed, there is considerable doubt whether conversion has any proper place by the side of Calvinistic predestination. And yet if Calvin would only have allowed freedom to the human will, there was much that was useful in his doctrine of preventing grace. S. Bernard had taught that the conversion of souls is "wrought by the voice of GOD, not of man."¹ And, that "the book of conscience must be illumined by a ray from above," else nothing will be decided as it ought. But neither S. Bernard nor S. Augustine² would have considered the will as entirely passive when GOD calls. Whereas Calvin maintained that souls are born again by a special Divine choice or decree, which, whenever He pleases, issues in an act of irresistible power, put forth upon these His elect. There is no possibility either of acceptance or of refusal on their part. "Efforts of the will" (says one who here approaches the Calvinistic position³), "when rational, are toilsome and tardy; but transformations of conscience happen by some new and intense affection, which conscience and reason do not lead but follow. We cannot expect or calculate on such a change; but the kingdom of GOD is within us." This irresistible visitation of the heart by Almighty GOD, being dependent on nothing but His mere pleasure, produces effects which are, of course, instantaneous. This is to be said of "almost all the remarkable moral recoveries that occur." Suddenness is, therefore, made the test, to a much greater degree than by the Methodists. And another exaggeration follows, from which Methodism is wholly exempt. Luther had not dared to tell his disciples that it was impossible for them to fall after their conversion. But

¹ S. Bern. *De Convers. ad Cler.* cap. i. and ii.

² See S. Augustine's great sermon (clviii.) on justification:—"Fides ergo quæ per dilectionem operatur si est in vobis, jam pertinetis ad prædestinatos, vocatos, justificatos: ergo crescat in vobis. Fides enim quæ per dilectionem operatur, sine spe esse non potest."

³ See James Martineau's *Endeavours after the Christian Life*, pp. 95-97.

Calvin did. And, to this day, his followers quote S. John's present tenses as if they carried the future with them:—"Whosoever is begotten of GOD doeth no sin, because His seed abideth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of GOD."

Holding such opinions, it is hardly possible that men of this school should trust much to sacraments. Jewel indeed, who accounted Calvin "a reverent father, and worthy ornament of the Church of GOD," declares that he had seen at Geneva more than four thousand people receiving together at one communion; so that it was "untrue" that "by M. Calvin's doctrine the sacraments of CHRIST are superfluous."¹ But we should remember that, where sectarian spirit is strong, a general communion may be little more than a great church-parade. The immense number mentioned by Jewel is in itself suspicious, and looks as if the sacraments were only not "superfluous" at Geneva because they were regarded as "badges or tokens" of a particular profession of religion. However, there is no difficulty in ascertaining what Calvin thought about the holy sacrament of the altar.² It is well known that he considered the benefit of communion as limited by GOD'S absolute decree; so that therein was no Bread of life, except to those already predestined to life by the arbitrary Divine will. With regard to penitence, it is equally known that he hated priestly absolution, even more than he loved presbyterian discipline.

A good deal, therefore, has to be struck off from the popular Protestant notions of conversion. It is not true that the grace which begins this happy change in a man turns him irresistibly to GOD, nor that it accomplishes its work in a moment, and without risk of future loss. It is not true that converting grace is seldom given to those of tender years. Nor, on the other hand, is it true that, while our will is free, we have nothing more to do, child or man, than to accept CHRIST'S obedience in place of our own. We are not called to a religion of feelings and convictions, but to take up the Cross and follow JESUS. And

¹ Jewel, vol. iv. p. 517.

² For a *résumé* of Calvin's teaching or belief, see *Wilberforce on the Holy Eucharist*, chap. ii.

lastly, the reception of sacraments has its proper and indispensable place in forming the Christian character.

III. We may now proceed, therefore, to the relation in which genuine conversion stands to sacramental penitence.

(1) One would like to insist much on the necessity of bringing nothing less than a converted heart to enter on the way which aims at reconciliation with GOD. It does not suffice that a Christian should go regularly to his "duties" before Easter. Small profit is there in a confession which is made only with the idea of "turning over a new leaf." The one worthy motive is that of self-surrender to JESUS CHRIST. Where that exists, it sheds a glory over all the penitential acts.

(a) Take self-examination. Without the heart surrendered, self-examination is dry, weary, and disheartening, like preparing a balance-sheet in anticipation of a deficit. But when the thought is present of consecrating all to GOD, instead of stopping at the things left undone or done amiss, we see in hope each gap supplied out of the riches of CHRIST; and even our deeper sins of disobedience are suggestions to us of what love may do, in atoning for them by contrary acts of virtue. We would dare to ask our Heavenly FATHER even to chastise His children, that "afterwards" His chastening may "yield peaceable fruit, in righteousness, to them that have been exercised thereby."

(b) Again, the self-surrender of conversion is more even than the sacrifice of a contrite heart. Sorrow for the love of GOD is holy; but it requires the addition of this to make it fervent and full of promise. "My GOD, I grieve that I have offended Thee by so many wilful sins. But I also venture to protest that my one desire and longing is to do Thee service in the time that still remains, and to the hour of my death."

(c) The same fervent love removes the sting from confession. All the shame is forgotten in a feeling, almost of joy, that GOD'S truth and honour should be thus vindicated. "O LORD, righteousness belongeth unto Thee, but unto us confusion of face. . . . To the LORD our GOD belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him."

(d) And although, upon His forgiveness granted, must ensue

the upward struggle of satisfaction by word and deed ; the love of a converted heart takes each burden as if it were no burden, nay, thinks everything possible to which the Master calls. "He that loveth, flyeth, runneth, and rejoiceth ; he is free, and cannot be held in. He giveth all for all, and hath all in all, because he resteth in one Highest above all things, from whom all that is good flows and proceeds."¹

That is one aspect of the relation between penitence and conversion. Very important, if we reflect on the number of perfunctory confessions that are made, by which neither is GOD glorified, nor the soul strengthened to run its appointed race. Without a converted will, truly the whole field of repentance is a barren waste, and the use of confession dishonouring to Him who claims our hearts for Himself.

(2) But if penitential discipline derives so much of its efficacy from the personal earnestness and zeal of those who resort to it, we can soon see, when we reflect, that the good done is reciprocal. Piety must submit to ruling : it must be set in a framework if it is to be made widely useful. Some have blamed the saint of Assisi for consenting to the foundation of an Order for his friars : they think that by so doing he destroyed the winning simplicity of his message of peace to mankind.² In reality, that was the only way to check extravagance. And yet, the commanding personal influence of S. Francis would have been felt by his mendicants, with or without written rules. But when a soul turns to GOD from out of the solitude of its own self-consciousness, unless the Church provides a method and a road to follow, it may lose all the good of its conversion. The disastrous consequences of a purely emotional religion are indeed but too well known.³ In order to avoid this, it has occurred to some to find in a particular event or accident that befell them from without, the suggestion of some special object

¹ From the *Imitation of Christ*, book iii. chap. v. ("Of the wonderful effect of Divine love.")

² For instance, M. Sabatier, in his fascinating *Life of S. Francis*.

³ Pusey has called attention (in a Sermon in Rom. vii. 22-25) to the abundance of Satan's resources ; and how one of his ways is "to teach people to neglect the means of grace ; to make all religion rest in certain feelings ; to hold a belief without living in it."

to which the rest of their lives should be consecrated.¹ GOD, indeed, often seems to call men to Him by such means; and the humble-minded have wisdom to hearken and obey. But such accidents are rare and uncertain, and conversion cannot wait for a special conjunction of circumstances which may never be granted.² The sacraments, on the contrary, are open to all, at all times.

To begin with, there is the grace of Baptism. That enables the child's heart to expand to the love of GOD, and inspires even the fallen with hope that he may return to a Divine sonship once enjoyed. Then, the Holy Communion gives definiteness to the search after spiritual union with CHRIST. But, of course, it is of Confession and Absolution that we are thinking chiefly. And confession and absolution are above all requisite when we would turn again to GOD after long separation by sin. For, however warm the desires of the heart towards GOD, they will profit us very little unless we first take ourselves to task for the actual wrong that we have done; and so work on by the regular course to that assurance of forgiveness, which will set us free to resume our long-neglected service. Now this way, which CHRIST offers to sinners in His Church, is always ready. It does not depend on moving incidents, flights of human eloquence, refinement of feeling, or any of those advantages granted to certain individuals, which are quite unknown to many others. It is a regular system, provided for the whole "household of faith," of which the intention is, that, in whatever state of life men are placed, they may not rest in sentiment, but proceed to make proof of their sincerity by the fruits which GOD requires. A system, too, in which, as we have so often had occasion to remark, there is no such thing as isolation. The whole Church mourns or rejoices *with* each repenting sinner. The fervour of conversion may begin with the individual; but, when brought into contact with the sacraments, conversion (so to speak) forgets its separate origin, being merged in that charity which makes, of

¹ There are many instances of this, from S. Francis to Jeanne D'Arc and her "voices." Or even in Horace (*Odes* I. xxxiv.).

² Special vocations and Providences are considered in the next chapter.

many, "one body in CHRIST, and every one members one of another." That is what keeps the flame alight. That is how the love of GOD, first felt in a lonely hour of sorrow, is at last made perfect through the contribution of many to an effort which is patient, and life-long, and full of joy.

CHAPTER XIV.

Christian Perfection.

FOR most of the time since we began, our thoughts have been turned to the laborious tasks of penitence, enjoined upon those who desire GOD'S pardon after some serious lapse. It was a dark road to travel, however surely it led towards the eternal sunshine. Absolution, indeed, was a word of deliverance; and conversion was an eager self-surrender, responding to the mercy that set one free. We thought, too, of a longer conversion, that increases and proceeds from strength to strength; by which the true penitent climbs, as it were, the heights of Christian duty, up to steeper slopes and keener air than he knew at the beginning. But what is to be the climax of the soul's ascending? How far may we follow this beautiful prospect, advancing in the ways of GOD?

Now, it is abundantly plain, that the only limit proposed to us in the Gospel is attainment of perfection. To quote two passages out of many, our LORD said that we should be "perfect, even as our heavenly FATHER is perfect." The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews said, "Let us cease to speak of the first principles of CHRIST, and press" (or, "be carried,") "on unto perfection." There may be one or two places where the word denotes only a consummation of privilege—a final stage in Church membership:¹ but, in nearly all, it means, without doubt, full maturity of spiritual growth.² Thus S. James gives it a special application to particular virtues, such as patience,³

¹ As for instance in 1 Cor. ii. 6. Not in Phil. iii. 15.

² The definition is Bishop Westcott's, on Heb. vi. 1. In the fifth of Hebrews, *τελειότης* is contrasted with *νηπιότης*.

³ S. James i. 4. So too S. Cyprian (*De Bono Pat.* 3) "Sic perfectos

or government of the tongue.¹ Generally, however, it seems to be the complete possession and practice of holiness in the sight of GOD. Like those words of S. Peter, "As He which called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living; because it is written,² Ye shall be holy, for I am holy."

Is Christian perfection then individual, or corporate? If we were to say corporate, we should support our view by what S. Paul has written on the contribution by "many members" to the health of the "one body;" and especially to that famous passage in the fourth of Ephesians, about "the measure of the stature of the fulness of CHRIST."³ There is, undoubtedly, a solidarity of faith and practice, only attainable by Christians in corporate relation to their Divine Head. But yet we cannot say that perfection is not to be aimed at by each of GOD'S children, separately, "according to the working in due measure of each several part. Perfection must really mean obedience to that "first and great commandment;" that one should love the LORD his GOD with the collected energies of "heart, mind, soul, and strength." Now, it would be rash to assert that only the whole Christian body can make that its endeavour. "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me more than these?" At the same time, where mutual charity exists as a "bond of perfectness" among neighbours, there can be little doubt that, by virtue of their agreement, love to Godward is also made stronger. But, in this chapter, we must attend chiefly to what each may try to

dixit fieri Dei filios, sic consummari docuit . . . si patientia Dei Patris maneat in vobis."

¹ S. James iii. 2. Lactantius (*De Vero Cultu*, vi. 13) says that there are three grades of virtue—to abstain from sins of deed, or word, or thought. "Qui primum gradum ascendit, satis justus est: qui secundum, jam *perfectæ virtutis*, siquidem neque factis, neque sermone delinquit: qui tertium, is vero similitudinem Dei assecutus videtur."

² This quotation from Leviticus by S. Peter is an instance of Christian expansion, and elevation of standard. The original precept enjoined little more than a ceremonial cleanness.

³ This passage is not so explained by all. Individualist commentators generally take it, as Dr. R. W. Dale does, of the perfection or maturity in CHRIST to which each separate Christian ought to attain. But I prefer, as usual, to follow S. Augustine:—"Ecce qui est vir perfectus, caput et corpus quod constat omnibus membris, quæ suo tempore complebuntur." (*De Civ. Dei*, lib. xxii. cap. xviii.) Clement is with the individualists: see end of this chapter.

do for himself: else there would be no continuity with what went before.

Has, then, a case ever occurred of a human soul (not reckoning, of course, the Holy Mother of GOD),¹ who was made absolutely perfect in, and through, the earthly trial? Could any of CHRIST'S redeemed dare to say at the end as He did, "It is finished?" Is not CHRIST Himself the only one to whom sure witness is borne that He was "made perfect through suffering? Certainly it would seem that the angel of death rarely finds a soul simply "resting from its labours," having nothing more that it could do or offer to its LORD, if life were prolonged. (Works of supererogation are not to the point here, for they are not what constitute perfection; and, besides, they might always be added to.) Possibly Enoch's translation may have been consequent upon a penitence wholly pleasing to GOD;² but of the older saints in general, if we hear in one place that they are become "spirits of just men made perfect," in another they are said still after death to require our concurrence in order to their perfection.³ Or if we select S. Paul from among Christians, we remember indeed his glorious boasting in CHRIST before his martyrdom, but we do not forget, either, what he had written very lately in another Epistle:—"Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect; but I press on." The road of perfection is always a way of desire.⁴ We cannot well advance farther than to what the same apostle prescribed for his Ephesians:—"Be ye imitators of GOD, as beloved children; and walk in love, even as CHRIST also loved you, and gave Himself up for you."

Again, so far as perfection *is* attainable in this world, it can only be by slow degrees. Here one must nearly repeat what was said in the last chapter. But whereas sudden conversions

¹ See S. Aug. *De Nat. et Grat.* xxxvi:—"De qua, propter honorem Domini nullam prorsus cum de peccatis agitur haberi volo quæstionem . . . Hac ergo Virgine excepta," etc.

² See *Ecclus.* xlv. 16; *Heb.* xi. 5.

³ *Heb.* xii. 23; xi. 40.

⁴ S. Augustine insists that the "perfect" in *Phil.* iii. 15 are the same who, in verse 13, were said to "forget the things which are behind, and stretch forth," etc. "Cum enim consummaverit homo, tunc incipit." (*De Trin.* ix. 1.)

are rare, sudden perfection is altogether fictitious ; it never can have been. Bishop Westcott shows this from the single word *φερώμεθα* in Heb. vi. *ad perfectionem feramur*. "Let us be borne on"—it is continuous, "not concentrated in one momentary crisis." And, surely, this would have been a superfluous remark, but for erroneous teaching that has prevailed on the subject. "Believers," said John Wesley, "grow dead and cold ; nor can this be prevented, but by keeping up in them an hourly expectation of being perfected in love. I say an hourly expectation ; for to expect it at death, or some time hence, is much the same as not expecting it at all."¹ He seems to have been convinced, first, that a Christian ought to desire perfection, and secondly, that his Methodists would not desire it unless it was made easy for them, and immediate. "To set it too high is the most effectual way to drive it out of the world ;" what every believer might have was constant communion with GOD by "humble love." The mistake was, probably, in giving to this unassuming fellowship with the Saviour a name which made the claiming it savour of spiritual pride. I do not know whether that doctrine survives among Methodists of the present day ; but it strikes one as too nearly akin to some of the self-righteous notions of more fanatical sects. Anyhow, the name chosen by Wesley belonged of right to a spiritual condition widely different. Perfection does mean love, and requires love;² but the love of the perfect is theirs, only, who by faith and patience have overcome the world. Nay, it is a love altogether singular ; a love never manifested on earth except once, and then flowing from the sacred heart of JESUS crucified. It is right that we should be "carried on" towards this ; but not that we should boast as if we possessed it. S. Francis himself, though he bore the *stigmata*, had no such vain dream of identification with his LORD.

To S. Paul our LORD said, on one well-remembered occasion, "My grace is sufficient for thee ; for My power is being perfected in weakness." Here we see the true attitude

¹ See Southey's *Life of Wesley*, vol. ii. p. 184.

² Compare, "that we may perfectly love Thee," (*Collect for Purity in Comm. Office*).

of a penitent towards the attainment of Christian holiness. Written deep in his memory is the recollection that he has obtained the Divine mercy, granted to himself. "Pardon, acceptance, peace, heaven, are opened at once to all who with penitent heart return to GOD through JESUS CHRIST our LORD."¹ Already, too, such a one is moved by intense and ardent longing to serve GOD. That is the sure evidence of his conversion. He is turned to GOD; and henceforth each act of obedience on his part will be a step nearer to the great Example. Yet he knows, and in time to come will know far more than now, how utterly weak he has made himself by his past yielding. It has been said that "each separate act of sin changes, so far, our moral nature and our trial."² The discovery has to be made, and only by degrees, how hard it is even when converted and forgiven to resist the tyranny of evil habits. We are no longer in that helpless condition of which the apostle wrote in Romans vii.—not subject to that inward warfare of a divided will, which seems to have had such a fascination for the fancy of our great English poet.³ For "there is no condemnation to them that are in CHRIST JESUS," and the law of the Spirit of life in CHRIST JESUS makes us free from the law of sin and death.⁴ Still, where there is familiarity with sins to which the temptations will recur, sad misgivings arise, which can only be removed by firm faith in the sufficiency of Divine grace. Many of us know too well what it is to be jealous of another, with a jealousy "cruel as the grave;"⁵ or, after many professions of piety, to have an utter distaste for religion—even to find out that a shallow irreverence is our most natural and congenial temper. Thus are we led to own our absolute dependence upon Him who calls us to the higher life. GOD'S

¹ See Pusey's Sermon on Ps. li. 10 (*Re-creation of the Penitent*).

² Pusey, same Sermon.

³ It has often been observed, that Shakspeare's study of Hamlet and other notable characters must have been derived from "To will is present with me, but to do," etc.

⁴ The point of importance is that, although the inward strife continues, we are no longer *subject* to defeat. As Shakspeare says again, truly, (though his Angelo fails miserably to act up to the lofty sentiment,) "'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus, another thing to fall." (*Measure for Measure*, Act ii., sc. 1).

⁵ Song of Solomon, viii. 6.

dealing with penitents, though indeed reconciled to Himself, is not so much amendment, as re-creation (*Ps. li. 10*). And while the soul's aim should be fixed on perfection and nothing less, the *immediate* object of prayers is, and must be, for power of victory over foes that hem one in. S. Augustine says that four states are possible to those exposed to temptation. The first is, *non pugnare sed trahi*. That is when one is "sold under sin," yet knows not that he is a slave. The next, *pugnare et vinci*; when he is roused to a sense of danger, yet finds no way of escape.¹ The next, *pugnare, et vincere*; which is the state of those risen with CHRIST, and seeking things above. And then the last is altogether heavenly: *non pugnare, et esse in pace vera atque perpetua*.² Now, although the third should be the rule by which true penitents habitually walk, they are not allowed, in so doing, to lay down their arms, nor to trust any leader but JESUS CHRIST. "By the grace of GOD I am what I am." Else no hope of escape—much less, of conquest.

It is an interesting question, whether one can make out landmarks on the way of perfection. In the general course, "that which hath been is that which shall be, and there is no new thing under the sun." Yet from time to time in our own personal experience, we seem to have come to what was no mere renewal of the past, but was felt, then and there, as a new departure. A voice from within seemed to say, "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." It might be that a fair field was opening out just then, through the melting of old inveterate prejudice. Or we summoned up courage for a struggle, the prospect of which looked fierce enough, yet came accompanied by a strange confidence of prevailing, unknown hitherto. Or,

¹ But "*Pugnare et Vinci*" is not without hope:—

"The man who, though his fights be all defeats
Still fights,
Enters at last
The heavenly Jerusalem's rejoicing streets
With glory more, and more triumphant rites,
Than always-conquering Joshua, when his blast
The frightened walls of Jericho down cast."

(*Coventry Patmore.*)

² S. Aug. *Enarr. in Ps. xxxv. 6*. (The reference has been taken from Pusey.) See also his sermons on Rom. vii. and viii. (Sermon cli.—clx.).

the change was not of environment, but in our own inmost selves. Now, when such feelings are experienced, do they in any real sense mark progress? Are we at those times like one who has climbed to the top of an eminence, and sees the promised land displayed to his view? As already said, it is an interesting question. What we must trust to chiefly is the past: we must "remember all the way which the LORD our GOD led us." In the spiritual life, the retrospect is what for the most part interprets the fresh beginning. And yet not alone the retrospect of what we have done; nor is that always, or entirely, to be trusted. For GOD does not let us rest in the persuasion that we have achieved certain results, or disposed finally of certain temptations. We cannot, so to speak, reckon our marches and our encampments, like Israel in the wilderness. We seldom behold our Egyptians dead on the sea-shore. As to good deeds, the memory of most persons, of the "holy and humble men of heart," is absolutely blank. It is not therefore altogether by what we have done or suffered hitherto that we can take the measure of future opportunities. Sometimes one may think that his Master's voice is calling him in some new direction, and yet be unable to attribute this to any cause that reason or experience can suggest. In that case he must wait, like Samuel, till the call is repeated. The only thing we are always sure of is, that JESUS CHRIST is Himself, to all of us, "the Way"—a living way which advances with us, keeping us in the same upward aim so long as we follow it. He never tells us exactly where we are, but his watchword is, ever, *Sursum corda*.

However, this is not quite all; for there is also an important question as to special Providences. Humility can suffer no injury by our noting these; love and thankfulness will be immensely deepened if we do; and as the result, we shall be able to look forward with a greatly increased confidence. One might be deceived for a moment, and begin to trace GOD'S hand where the impulse came rather from one's own self-will. But such mistakes are usually corrected after a little while: and the truth is that we are more likely to see *less* than we ought, than too much, where the question is of accepting an intimation from heaven. Have not the psalmists told us of an Eye that

never sleeps, and Ears open to our prayers? And our Blessed LORD, did not He speak of knowing the sheep of His flock one by one, and leading them safely, according to their strength? Beginning from that certainty, we are right to notice things particular and private to ourselves; and to observe various "changes and chances," through which He has been making "all things work together for good" to those whom He has been teaching to love Him. In this sense, the past does indeed interpret the future: GOD'S past, that is, not our own. The voice sounds familiar to-day, because, though the marching orders are new, the tones are the same that we have heard so many times. We do not read that Elijah was surprised or in doubt, either when an angel brought him food for a journey that would have been beyond his strength, or when the GOD of his fathers met and spake with him at the scene of His ancient covenant with Israel.

But if the Providence of GOD is special, and apportioned to the needs of separate souls, is there at the same time *uniformity* in His method of leading souls to perfection? To a large extent, one may believe, there is. Thus for a great number, at their first conversion, the immediate prospect is of conflict with one or more masterful passions. Together with the flame of love which the HOLY SPIRIT kindles, is given a clear perception of danger from the besetting sin. The features of that are familiar enough. Much, indeed, remains still to be discovered: the hold that the sin had gained on the memory, and, through the memory, on the imagination and desires of the heart; or, again, the subtle connection between that and other faults, which would scarcely have been known without it.¹ Those discoveries are only made by degrees; the whole extent of the evil is probably never ascertained. But yet, a good deal has been brought to light. For not in vain does one pray, "Search me, O GOD, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts." Self-examination, if performed honestly and with a pure intention, cannot fail to reveal the form of the enemy

¹ So S. Aug. (*Enarr. in Ps. lvii. 4*), "De peccato peccatum, et ad peccatum peccatum, propter peccatum. . . . Quis omnia possit numerare, quæ connectuntur peccata peccatis?"

against whom CHRIST'S warrior has next to contend. Now certainly this is one already put to flight by the virtue of Christian repentance. In the act of humbling himself at his LORD'S feet, the penitent received, by the very words of pardon, an earnest of victory. But the foe has not been beaten back very far; and not to attack him now would be to court defeat and disgrace. As says the author of the *Spiritual Combat*, "You are hemmed in by enemies, and under the absolute necessity of fighting, or perishing for ever."¹

There may have been exceptions to this, in the case of eminent saints.² A wonderful repentance like S. Peter's led to no return of the sin of presumption, nor even to the suggestion of such a thing, so far as we can judge. But, as a rule, covetous men are tempted again to lay up treasures on the earth: angry men are sorely tried in their temper: frivolous ones are hard put to it to forbear the idle jest; and so with other common, if not the most crying, sins. The most crying are perhaps less capable of resuscitation: they leave a wholesome horror behind, which will last to the end of one's days. High principle and self-respect come to the aid of contrition in abjuring them. Nay, it is very possible that when we think of enemies surrounding our path, we ought not often to suppose Satan present among them. The devil is not always so near as is imagined. Some have spoken, indeed, as if there were almost a merit in having a disposition to be fiercely tempted, or "drawn away by one's own lust:" as if a man were scarcely worth looking at unless he had it in him to become certainly a blasphemer, and not improbably a murderer.³ That is absurd exaggeration.

¹ *Spiritual Combat*, chap. xvi.

² As S. Chrysostom says, καὶ τὰ πτώματα τῶν ἁγίων λαμπρά.

³ This does not seem unfair criticism of some of the "muscular" zealots of forty years ago. Yet the musculars did at least believe in wrestling with evil and overcoming it. Their wild beast was to be tamed. They would not leave their demoniac till he was "clothed and in his right mind." Thus they were preferable, on the whole, to feeble moralisers of our own day, who attribute their own or their neighbours' vices to heredity, and so let them rest, as if regeneration in baptism went for nothing. In our own youth, we used to dispel such gloomy fancies by reading *Sintram*, or *The Heir of Redclyffe*. At this date, one may do better by mentioning a magnificent Lecture of Dr. Dale's, *Christian Men, God's*

There is nothing grand in resembling a wild beast; and GOD's children, whom the HOLY SPIRIT has led from their baptism, though they have grieved Him much, yet, when they repent, are not deprived of that Divine gentleness which He imparts. Yet to be tempted soon after one's conversion is the general rule; one reason being that the recollection of former sins is then so fresh, and it is easy to fall back into habits that had been allowed to become a second nature. There are still those haunting ghosts, and a very little would suffice to clothe them anew with flesh and bones.

What tactics should be employed in this warfare, must be left to others to tell. Nearly all is set down, arranged with marvellous skill, in that small book which S. Francis de Sales valued more than all the contents of his library—*The Spiritual Combat*. We should observe, however, that a great deal of the secret of victory is explained in the New Testament itself, and that S. Paul's method is aggressive, like Scupoli's. Wicked suggestions are to be quelled through practising the opposite virtues. The shield is faith; the helmet, hope; the sword is that courageous charity which boldly proclaims GOD's truth. Happily, these rules are very well known. Let us proceed to another step in the upward path.

We must not flatter ourselves that we shall ever, to the end of our days, cease to tread the *via purgativa*; but still, as we have seen, it is for the earlier stages of service that GOD for the most part ordains conflict. After this, we go on our way through the world, marching steadily on the whole under the Master's banner, without much disturbance; yet still signing ourselves continually with the Cross, to keep the affections mortified. It is in little things that the apostle's precept tells most, "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of GOD." "Few reach perfection," it has been said, because "when they have overcome

Workmanship, in his book on the Ephesians. Surely it is an unworthy spirit, which distrusts God's institution of "honourable marriage." "Did He not make one [in matrimony] and wherefore one? He sought a godly seed." (*Mal.* ii. 15; compare *1 Cor.* vii. 14.)

their greater faults with much toil, they will not bear the vexation and weariness of resisting the countless little wishes and movements of the passions.”¹ Wrongful indulgences are not desired, perhaps, for one’s own sake ; but there are frequent solicitations from somewhat worldly friends, in whose society it is impossible not to take pleasure ; and these are likely to draw one on to the utmost limit of what is permissible. Habits which are not actually wicked may be great hindrances to a soul’s union with GOD and growth in the spiritual life.

And so the resistance to these lesser evils has to be kept up. The Christian soldier wears his armour still, and keeps it bright. But it is a vexation to have to do so : no one feels enthusiasm for what looks so little like active service. Spiritual writers descant on the “monotony of piety,” as one of the heaviest of our daily burdens. We become very weary of asking for heroic virtues, when there seems not the remotest prospect of their being called into exercise.

But GOD is not unrighteous, that He should forget the “labour of love” which His children would willingly bestow. While hearts are beginning to fail, and spirits droop, He is preparing some fresh employment, to lift off their load of weariness. So it is proved sometimes, when He is pleased to point out to any one a definite vocation in life. And although many, alas ! miss their vocation because it displeases them, there can hardly be any who journey down to the grave without GOD’S offer coming in some shape or other.²

Vocations to what is termed “the religious life” are not precisely what we now have in view. Of that dedication of self by a holy threefold vow, one can but speak with the utmost respect and reverence. Yet a community-life such as these “religious” lead, even outside the cloister, is too apart from the world to be quite an instance in point. What one should mean, rather, are opportunities for some fresh using of talents for GOD, without quitting the accustomed occupations and haunts. It is obvious that there are possibilities of failures

¹ *Spiritual Combat*, chap. xii.

² Compare the second Collect for Good Friday : “That every member of the same, in his vocation and ministry,” etc.

here : some persons will have no real desire to give their best, and will therefore not ask to be called up to a higher level of usefulness ; or may ask, but only as pleading to be allowed to follow a self-chosen path. Whereas the essential thing in vocation is, that they are GOD'S callings, not man's selections.¹ "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." Thus the opportunity, when it comes, is never exactly what had been expected. When our LORD invited a young ruler to sell all and give to the poor, it is not unlikely that he was repelled by the strangeness of the proposal, as well as by the magnitude of the sacrifice. We must humbly accept what is sent, though it crosses the path of our preference—nay, humbles our pride to the very dust. After a while we shall find our truest joy in that which was so little to our mind at the beginning. In most questions of this kind, a humble-minded person is very rarely deceived. "With the lowly is wisdom." When S. Martin detected Satan under the disguise of a glorified CHRIST, it was because the enemy had not been able to counterfeit the marks of the sacred Passion. A vocation that would minister to pride is commonly open to suspicion : it comes not from that Divine Victim of Calvary, with the pierced Hands.

But how wonderful the delight of receiving a true call from GOD, to one who has turned to Him from the ways of sin, and turned with all his heart ! "Thou who didst deny Me thrice art he whom I have chosen to feed My sheep, to strengthen My brethren, to build My Church." How reassuring, to be offered promotion after so many backslidings !

"O turn, and be thou turn'd ! the selfish tear,
In bitter thoughts of low-born care begun,
Let it flow on, but flow refin'd and clear,
The turbid waters brightening as they run.

"Let it flow on, till all thine earthly heart
In penitential drops have ebb'd away,
Then fearless turn where Heaven hath set thy part,
Nor shudder at the Eye that saw thee stray."²

¹ This is well illustrated by 1 Cor. xii. 4-7. Vocations, considered from God's side, are *φανερώσεις τοῦ Πνεύματος πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον*.

² Keble's *Christian Year* : "Third Sunday after Trinity."

It is the being able to look up calmly to meet the Master's eye, and accept His destination, "*where Heaven hath set thy part,*" which proves the blessedness of having received a true vocation from GOD. To each sincere penitent, here is a fresh and powerful inducement to press on towards perfection.

There is sure to be profit accruing from working out a vocation faithfully. The most general leading is to something which will help others as well as the individual. Vocations are indeed innumerable, and of endless variety; but let us take a few of what are most commonly offered to the acceptance of Christians. For example, many persons are called to prayer: GOD gives them leisure for this, and directs their attention to the huge ungodliness of the age, and how few there are who pray for themselves. Or He gives openings for study; introductions, it may be, not within reach of most [men, to a thorough science of history.¹ Or they have a large sum of money to dispose of. Or they go out to Africa, to educate the tribes, and convert them to the faith. Or, remaining in their own country, they have special opportunities for cultivating some useful social science. Or they are called to nurse and tend the sick. Or, themselves sick and afflicted, they illuminate the house where they dwell with the glory of their Christian patience. What is the result in every case? That they are no longer alone, as when they "mourned apart" for private and personal transgressions, many of which were known only to GOD; but rather now, in fulfilling their vocation, they are brought into cheerful contact with other souls, aiding them as they may, and being helped by them in return. We should remember, however, that a man's progress in perfection does not necessarily depend on the numbers to whom he makes himself useful. To convert a hundred people is, in the abstract, a better success than to save one: to build a Cathedral is a greater feat than to repair a poor man's cottage. But there is only one way to fulfil a vocation, namely, by doing that very thing which GOD sent us to do. Nothing added to that will make our service more grateful to Him. No apparent in-

¹ The late Bishop Creighton evidently considered his remarkable historical ability in the light of a sacred vocation from God.

significance in the task which, alone, He *did* offer for our performance, can prevent its contributing to our spiritual growth, if we have loved it for His sake and the brethren's.¹ "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

Truly it is well to have these special directions given to our energies after conversion. Without them, we should be much too prone to "run uncertainly," to "fight as one beating the air," hardly conscious of a definite aim, still less of any hope that could be the soul's anchor in stormy weather. With them, we may struggle on, though far from the appointed goal; and, according to the measure of the gifts that each has received, we can "minister the same one to another," for the edifying of the Body of CHRIST. Thus He cheers the hearts of penitents, by letting them feel that He trusts them and would make them instruments of His love to the Church at large.

When anyone is thus conscious of having received a definite call, and is striving to "walk worthy of his vocation,"² whatever it be, he is likely to value the Blessed Sacrament with a special devotion. For he will learn to regard that as the highest means of progressive sanctification provided for this long earthly trial. On the one hand, the weakness of his endeavours will have taught him profound distrust of self: though he has been guided into his own allotted path, he has found proof that one may stumble, even on the right road: "apart from JESUS, we can do nothing." But, on the other hand, he will be persuaded that none labour in vain, though outward success be denied them, if they habitually "dwell in CHRIST, and CHRIST in them."

¹ So S. Aug. (*in Ps. xlix. cap. 13*): "Tantum emit vidua duobus minutis, quantum Zacchæus dando dimidium patrimonium."

² However, both in Ephes. iv. and in the Romans, S. Paul refers chiefly to the one calling into the kingdom of heaven, which *all* Christians have received, repenting, at their baptism. So, for the most part, S. Augustine:—"Aversi eramus, quando sumus vocati." (*Serm. clviii. 3.*) "Vocati sumus, quando Christiani facti sumus." (*Serm. clviii. 4.*) And, of course, all subsequent special vocations are founded on that.

Indeed, the Holy Communion so far surpasses other aids to perfection, that comparison of It with anything else is impossible. To fight battles for CHRIST, to receive His counsels for precepts—all these are good; perhaps, even, a little glorious. But in the Blessed Sacrament we are actually made one with CHRIST. All other hopes of recovery and renewed usefulness would fail. Happy, indeed, is the man who never again commits that great offence of which he is now ashamed, nor yields to that worst sinful indulgence, from which he has torn away his heart. Such examples of steadfastness do occur after a true conversion. Then, it may be, in his best and brightest mood, one may dream of doing great things for GOD; and each morning, when he rises from sleep, his inward song will be almost of triumph. But, alas! that will not be always, nor for long. Hours of darkness succeed, during which the only thought is a dreary consciousness of some former sin following after and finding one out, and oneself powerless for good, whether by word or example. "Behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice." Then it is that the poor desponding spirit goes simply to CHRIST, kneels before Him at His Altar, and eats His Flesh, and partakes of everlasting life. "As the living FATHER sent Me, and I live by the FATHER; so he that eateth Me, he shall also live because of Me."

"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Although we cannot suppose that this "Angels' Food" is intended only for those who have deeply sinned, there can be no doubt that the Blessed Sacrament does peculiarly meet the need of penitents. It was by a happy inspiration that the framers of our Liturgy introduced those Comfortable Words,¹ CHRIST'S invitation to the weary and heavy-laden. For He is present, as we know, to renew on our behalf the oblation of his pure Flesh and cleansing Blood; that so the virtue of His Passion may stand for ever between us and the punishment which our sins had deserved. "He is present, not as a judge, but as a Redeemer;

¹ Adapted, however, from Hermann's *Consultation*: see Procter and Frere's *History of the Book of Common Prayer*.

not to condemn, but to save; not to visit our offences, but to cleanse us from them . . . Himself the Salvation our eyes wait for, not partaking of our decay, but restoring our waste places, that He may dwell there, and, by dwelling, restore them.”¹ More and more, as time runs on, and we feel the utter disorder that our sins have introduced, into motives, desires, actions, habits, do we learn to rest in a truth and righteousness that are unchanging; not substituted, but freely imparted to us, who feed on Him, believe in Him, abide in Him, are joined and united to Him by a deathless union for ever and ever. He who can say, “To me to live is CHRIST,” has learned the whole secret of spiritual perfection.

Nothing can compare with the Holy Communion; and yet there is, lastly, one more most precious fellowship with Himself, which He grants to the humble and contrite. This resides in what has often been called the sacrament of suffering. “If ye are without chastening, whereof all have been made partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.” Over and above that universal law—so “grievous” at the beginning, so “fruitful” of peace and righteousness to those who “have been exercised thereby”—there exist many peculiar causes of sorrow, which are derived from past indulgence in sin. The world is cruel to some sorts of reformed characters: if they had persisted in their evil ways, who would have cared? but it is an affront to Egypt when its pleasant sins are despised—when Moses “accounts the reproach of CHRIST greater riches than all its treasures.” So too the flesh has its own natural vengeance to take for riotous living: the errors of youth must be atoned for in the bodies which gave them place. Or shall we take, rather, the trial of loneliness, which is a frequent consequence of breaking away from bad habits, even without the occurrence of persecution? Indeed, a man may be sad and lonely, although fulfilling a vocation which brings him into contact with others. He does his work for them as required, but he makes no friendly advances towards them. He dares not gather companions round him. While Martha served and was hospitable, Mary, once a sinner, chose solitude and retirement. The way of

¹ From Pusey's *Sermon on Increased Communions*.

repentance is not sociable. We have indeed the comfort of knowing that others pray for us when the whole Church is praying; but in our daily lives we are mourners, reserved and silent. Thus we miss a good deal of the support that others enjoy. We have less of that cheerful companionship which is given to so many, to assuage grief, or soothe the pains of sickness. And perhaps at the close of life, while bodily strength is fast decaying, we are most of all unfriended and desolate. But then it is CHRIST draws near to us, bestowing His peace, opening as it were His wounds, drawing us to His heart and bidding us share His reproach. To be crucified with CHRIST is that which chiefly lifts up the penitent to a near view of the beauty of the resurrection. If I am "a witness of the sufferings of CHRIST," then also "a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed." And when S. Paul prayed for those who must expect the discipline of pain, his thought would ever be of their greater strengthening:—"May ye be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding . . . strengthened with all power, according to the might of His glory, unto all patience and longsuffering with joy: giving thanks unto the FATHER, who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

There is at the same time a special humility of patience, exhibited in suffering, which is thought to be the most shining grace of an habitually contrite spirit. Perhaps the best and most beautiful description of that is Wordsworth's:—

"The darts of anguish fix not where the seat
Of suffering hath been thoroughly fortified
By acquiescence in the Will supreme
For time and for eternity: by faith,
Faith absolute in God, including hope,
And the defence that lies in boundless love
Of His perfections; with habitual dread
Of aught unworthily conceived, endured
Impatiently, ill done, or left undone,
To the dishonour of His holy Name."¹

Such is the penitent's progress towards perfection. Not

¹ Wordsworth's *Excursion*, bk. iv.

such as redeemed man's ought to have been. The path by which one passes within the rainbow to the Throne of mercy should present no obstacles to a heart that loves. Each Christian's course to the highest good should be "an ever onward course: if there be occasional stumblings and infirmities, yet nothing inconsistent with the state of grace." (*Pusey*.) Here, on the contrary, we see sadness and perplexity, short-lived hopes almost quenched by self-condemning fears, heavy sorrow hardly relieved by recollection of GOD'S invincible pity. Yet, wherever a soul does not quite cast away love and trust, "all things work together for good" for that soul. Through temptations and conflicts; uniform monotony of service or special ministries and vocations; refreshment of sacraments or experience of suffering; it is led forward by One who never forgets, who awaits His redeemed in heaven, who has swallowed up death in victory.

But, in all the stages of our progress, we should persevere with the use of sacramental confession. For by this we revive the memory of that Divine mercy which once blotted out the sinful past: we renew a sorrow which should be life-long: we rouse ourselves to fresh exertions: we make our best preparation for "coming holy and clean to the heavenly Feast, in the marriage-garment which GOD requires:"¹ and we judge ourselves before Him, not forgetting that last and strict account that we shall yet have to render after death.

This chapter might well conclude with a short passage from S. Bernard, who says, "Our salvation consists in two things, namely, justification and glorification. One at the beginning [of our course], the other is our perfection. In that, is labour; but in this, the fruit of our labour. And now indeed we are justified by faith, whereas the glory will be through sight."² The labour is penitential, and our very life, he says, is given us *ad agendam penitentiam*; but that must not hinder us from passing on towards perfection; from expecting earnestly the climax of Christian hope. Slow and difficult may be the penitent's onward path: by fasting, and prayer, and alms-

¹ See the First Exhortation in our Communion Office.

² See S. Bernard (*Serm De Diversis*, cv.).

deeds he keeps back carnal desires and enticements of the wicked world : but at each stage he remembers the glory that shall be revealed, and the manifestation of the sons of GOD.

Law's treatise upon Christian perfection is also well known. He says, "No one can have any assurance that he pleases GOD, or puts himself within the terms of Christian salvation, but he who serves GOD with his whole heart, and with the utmost of his strength. Though we are not called to such a perfection, as implies a sinless state ; though our imperfections will not prevent the Divine mercy, yet it cannot be proved that GOD has any terms of favour for those who do not labour to be as perfect as they can be. . . . It is as necessary to labour after Perfection, as to labour after our Salvation, because we can have no satisfaction that a failure in one will not deprive us of the other."¹

These two writers are thoroughly consistent with each other, and with the third chapter of Philippians.

But one hardly sees how a doctrine like S. Bernard's or William Law's can be reconciled with that "apathy" in which philosophers have supposed that moral perfection resides. Clement of Alexandria describes one "temperate and passionless, proof against pleasures and pains, as they say the adamant is against fire : " such a man, he thinks, should be reckoned "perfect, grown to the full measure of stature."² S. Augustine on the contrary teaches that the passions are to be, not extinguished, but "turned to righteous uses. We do not so much enquire whether a pious man is angry, as why he is angry: not whether he fears, but what he fears." And again, "When there shall be no sin in a man, *then* there shall be this ἀπάθεια. He who thinks he lives without sin puts aside not sin but pardon."³

Certainly the Augustinian doctrine is what agrees best with the continual conflict of a missionary. One thing, however, may well be remembered on the other side. We missionaries are apt to be fretful, disturbed by many anxious cares ; and our

¹ See Law's *Christian Perfection*, chap. xiv.

² See Clem. Alex. *Strom.* vii. 67, 68 (Mayor's translation).

³ See S. Aug. (*De Civ. Dei.* ix. 5 : xiv. 9).

LORD has shown, in the first of His parables, how sadly these hinder perfection. It would do us no harm to look up oftener than we do from our troubled sea to the calm heavens above us; and to cultivate, though in the midst of much "labour and travail," the "peace of GOD which passeth all understanding."

CHAPTER XV.

The Last Judgment.

[A meditation on the Visible Presence of CHRIST, before which sin will at last be confounded, and contrition receive its final acceptance.]

WE are not saved by fear, but by hope. The higher a Christian lifts his expectation of what is attainable through grace, the more will his Master, by the attraction that is in His Name, draw him to heaven and to Himself. Our nearest approach to perfection is when we are patient yet eager travellers by the way that leads to a perfect state, far distant, but ardently longed for.

However, repentance has been the subject of these pages, and repentance should hold its ground in the concluding chapter. Now there is one among motives to repentance, to which all ages and nearly all thoughtful men have been wont to assign pre-eminence. This is, the prospect of a Judgment to come. The Judgment is placed, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, among six fundamentals in which Christians hearers are to be instructed at the outset. It is also congenial to declining years. It comes in when other reflections have had their turn, and little remains to be attended to, except the last account. Then this abides as the final aim—that, when the LORD appears, one “may be found in peace, without spot and blameless” before Him. So it supplies the first great motive, and the last.

Those who began the preaching of the Gospel, while insisting that “the goodness of GOD leadeth men to repentance,” would also “persuade by the terror of the LORD ;” for

they remembered how Himself had said, "Fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." The Church marks an intimate connection between the thought of the last Day, and whatever she enjoins of penitential earnestness.¹ We judge ourselves here, that we may not be condemned hereafter. We submit to a tribunal of mercy in this life, that we may dare to stand before that tribunal of justice inexorable, over which CHRIST will preside at His coming. As surely as, here, His mercy is offered to all, will His judgment hereafter include the whole human race, and especially the Catholic Church.²

I. We should note the directness with which our LORD and His apostles cause our thoughts to travel towards the great last Judgment. Revealed in vivid allegory, CHRIST is seen upon His Throne, seated in the presence of all His creatures. The intervening ages are forgotten: here is the end to which swift fancy wings its flight, planting us already at the point to which all history is tending, at the feet of the Son of Man. We can realise in part the extraordinary impression produced on those who witnessed the Transfiguration, or listened to the "signs of His coming," and that wonderful triad of parables in S. Matthew xxv.; or were present when, standing bound before the chief priests, He astonished them by applying to Himself the magnificent imagery of Daniel:—"Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." There was nothing new in the idea of men rendering an account of their lives hereafter. The new thought was, of CHRIST being Himself the Judge: that His judging would be the climax of His rule and Kingdom; and this the strange result of the deep humiliation of His Passion. The apostles appear to have accepted the revelation with an entirely resolute faith. When left by their Master at Jerusalem, they knew that He had gone to sit at GOD'S right hand till His "foes were made His footstool;" at the

¹ See the Service "for denouncing God's anger against sinners" (Commination), at the beginning of Lent; in which there is much insistence on the account to be rendered after death.

² See 1 S. Peter iv. 17, 18.

end of the world He would "come in like manner as they had seen Him go into heaven;" and His coming would be to judgment. That, and His death and resurrection, were closely associated in their minds: He had risen, as they believed, for the sake of being manifested thus in glory as King over all. If S. Paul preaches repentance at Athens, it is "inasmuch as GOD hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead."

In those early days, hopes were entertained that, between CHRIST'S resurrection and His second advent, no long space would intervene: that He would then set up a kingdom on this earth, and reign with His saints a thousand years.¹ S. Paul's earliest epistles show that that expectation prevailed among the Macedonian churches; and his gentle warning to Thessalonica seems intended only to postpone the question till after the fall of the Roman power. But when, a good while after, S. Peter was writing his second Epistle,² a change of feeling, if not of conviction, had begun. Now, men were asking, "Where is the promise of His presence? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Nor did S. Peter in his answer give any ground for returning to the former persuasion. Rather, he accepted the delay, and showed that it was attributable to the Divine long-suffering; assuring his disciples

¹ The Millenarian view survived for several centuries. It is advocated by S. Justin Martyr (*Dialog.* 80, 81), and strongly maintained by S. Irenæus (lib. v. chap. xxxiv.); who also quotes S. Papias. These two were disciples of S. Polycarp, of whose writings not enough is extant to show whether he himself was a Chiliast or not, (though he speaks of the saints reigning with CHRIST). Mr. R. Travers Smith, (*The Church in Roman Gaul*, p. 85) thinks it probable that S. Irenæus was led to a literalistic treatment of passages like Isaiah xi. and Rev. xx., through dread of the exaggerated and fantastic spiritualism of the Gnostics. But the Millenarian notion survived still later, and is found in Lactantius, (*Epit.* chap. xi.). Eusebius condemns it, (*Hist.* iii. 39).

² I may be permitted to leave to scholars to determine the vexed question of the date of S. Peter's second Epistle. It does not concern us here in any way.

that with GOD "a thousand years are as one day." Thus he prescribed an attitude of complete uncertainty as to "days and seasons," in which all subsequent ages have acquiesced. Only we must not suppose that the delay implies "slackness concerning His promise."

One result was inevitable from the postponement of the second Advent of JESUS CHRIST. Instead of travelling on always to the Judgment, Christians would learn to take an ever-increasing interest in what is called the intermediate state. This was not the mere short sleep or rest that had been supposed, but (for those who departed "in CHRIST") a long "sabbatism," to endure beyond computation by centuries, or even thousands of years. More and more, therefore, the tendency of modern piety has been to speculate on what is happening to "the souls of the righteous" who are "in the hand of GOD;" and how these continually grow in the knowledge and love of Him who is their life. How far penitence may be characteristic of the Church expectant, was suggested briefly in Chap. xii.; and it is unnecessary to return to the subject now. But another thought that has come to the front is of a particular judgment, to be passed on each individual soul as it quits the body. This, too, was sure to have prominence, so soon as man realised that the present dispensation might be prolonged indefinitely. They recoiled from the teaching—if such a thing ever was taught—that the "living agent"¹ in man, the immortal spirit which by dissolution had "returned to GOD who gave it," should be kept in blank ignorance of its ultimate destination. And so, after some troubled surmisings—for the earlier Alexandrian thinkers could not shake off the heathen's dread of malignant "powers" waiting to seize the naked soul²—by degrees they returned to

¹ See Butler's *Analogy*, part I. chap. i.

² See Dr. Mayor's note on Clement (*Strom.* lib. vii. cap. xiii.), who says [ὁ γνωστικός] οὐκ αἰσχύνεται ἀποθανών, ταῖς ἐξουσίαις ὀφθῆναι. Dr Mayor's comment is, "I think the ἐξουσίαι are the accusing angels, who oppose the admission of the dying Christian into Paradise." (References to other Greek writers follow.) Dr. Bright (in *Dict. Chr. Biogr.*), quotes a passage from Theophilus of Alexandria on the awfulness of the particular judgment: "What fear and trouble and anguish we have to see when the soul is parted from the body!"

those happier ideas derived from Jewish tradition, which our LORD Himself had sanctioned; and believed that, though in death, each man's soul is "required of him," and in Hades a "deep gulf is fixed" between the wicked and the righteous, yet for the latter is prepared a peaceful resting-place in the bosom of "our father Abraham."

At the present time, most serious thinkers acknowledge a particular judgment: perhaps, each one's death is, in itself, his judgment.¹ His soul then passes to this side or to that, according to the choice that he made for himself while in the body. He is still the same man, only, there can be no more of "working out his own salvation." If he refused Divine grace before, he cannot accept it now. If his works were done in faith, they "follow" him, but he cannot add to them in respect of merit. Of this he will be fully conscious; and so already, in a true sense, will have passed through a judgment, or crisis, decisive of his eternal gain or loss. What he cannot know, in his yet imperfect condition, are the measures of punishment prepared for the wicked, or the rewards of glory for the righteous. We should observe also that, as regards the particular judgment, we have no knowledge of a sentence to be passed by the lips of JESUS CHRIST. If we were to grant the truth of inspiration to those wonderful stanzas of Newman's in *The Dream of Gerontius*, we should still believe that the soul is guided to its place by the eye, not voice, of our Incarnate LORD.

There is, therefore, a consummation still to be expected, and an account to be rendered "to the Judge of quick and dead." From musing on the intermediate state, we return in thought to "that Day," and the plain language of apostles concerning it. It is like coming from dreams to realities. *Apparebo conspectui Tuo*. We almost seem to see CHRIST'S Throne of Judgment. Some have felt that they could hear, like a continual call, the pealing trumpet of the Archangel. Even those to whom vivid metaphors are not moving or

¹ So Father Congreve (*Parable of the Ten Virgins*, p. 51), says, "Death constitutes the particular judgment of each human soul: it determines our eternal condition."

eloquent, are struck by S. Paul's habit of turning and returning to this subject, as if it were never out of his mind. The passages are almost too familiar to be quoted :—"The Day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." "Why dost thou judge thy brother? We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of GOD . . . each one of us shall give account of himself to GOD." "We must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of CHRIST; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Nor is it S. Paul only. "Murmur not one against another," writes S. James, "that ye be not judged: behold the Judge standeth before the doors." And S. Peter, "They that speak evil shall give account to Him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead." And S. John, having in his Epistle exhorted to a perfect love, such as will give "boldness in the day of judgment," concludes his "testimony" with "Amen: come, LORD JESUS." There is no more remarkable instance of contrast between most modern theology and that of the New Testament, than in respect of judgment to come; which we so strangely omit, while to the apostles it was an essential cornerstone to their foundation of doctrine.

II. We are not excused for our neglect by the fact that Christians generally have ceased to believe that the LORD'S appearing can be imminent. One might rather ask, Why should so much pains have been taken to seize our attention? Why should such peculiarly striking language have been employed to depict this tremendous drama, if it were *not* removed from our ken by illimitable ages? However, no one can expect that the vivid details will impress all alike. What we should rather consider is that, to the Church of CHRIST, a consummation of all things, when it comes, *must* take the form of a Judgment by CHRIST Himself—a judgment reversing or confirming all that went before. Nothing less could fulfil the purpose of His Incarnation. The question, to members of His Church, is not so much of individual righteousness or guilt. Or rather, we have indeed "a law written in our hearts," by which we are accountable to our Maker, who gave us reason

and freewill; but much more than that arises out of our adoption into the family of GOD in CHRIST. For CHRIST is Saviour of the whole of our complex nature and of all human flesh that partakes of renewal in Him. His life imparted is common to all mankind through grace. From which it follows, that we are not only His members, but members one of another, in His mystical Body, the Church. We shall be judged as one body, one redeemed family.

Of His right of dominion over those whom He thus regards, there can be no doubt. When CHRIST "lived again," it was that He "might be LORD both of the dead and the living." But it is also most certain that so long as this earthly dispensation lasts, though He be our only Master and LORD, He compels none of us to bow down and acknowledge Him. Nor does He interfere with our mutual relationships among ourselves. Though experience shows that those who renounce His allegiance are generally also false to their obligations as Christian brethren, He leaves this, too, to happen if it must. He does not establish a compulsory union among us, either of sentiment or practice. If any refuse to honour the Eternal FATHER in the person of His Divine SON, they can do so; or if they choose to do violence to Christian brotherhood by schisms, factions, and wars, they are equally uncontrolled, for so long as the present life continues.

But this long forbearance shall have an end. Heresy and unbelief cannot stand for ever before Him who is the Truth. Nor selfish cruelty, before Him who said, "Love one another, as I have loved you." Succeeding therefore to this kingdom of grace, which now subsists by the mere long-suffering of GOD, there must be a kingdom of glory, in which CHRIST shall be manifested to all, and obeyed by all, His creatures. Those who are found rejecting His love then, are rejected by Him also: those who believed on Him and confessed Him here, are received into His joy. And this for ever; because the Church's trial in the world will have ended, and CHRIST'S former mediatorial rule passed away *with* that, so that "there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins." Our Christian faith requires us to believe, first, that CHRIST Himself will be

our Judge, because we belong to Him in every way, body and soul, by every right whether of creation or redemption ; so that we shall be judged in the whole of our nature which He took, and in the sight of One made like unto us in all things, only without sin. Next, that, inasmuch as He came to form us into a Church, of which the members should share a common life from Himself, and live under His "new law" of charity, we must render account not only to Him, but, in some measure, to our brethren also in Him. Whatever may happen to the heathen, we shall come to the last Judgment with the stamp of our Catholic communion upon us. Then, lastly, that although, before that Day appear, the stream of time may roll on far beyond any limit that we can reckon, yet our King only waits for a consummation predetermined of GOD—known already to the FATHER, in whose Hand are all things. Known however only to Him, though saints pray in Paradise that it may come, and the Church on earth both discharges the same duty of supplication, and strives by works of penitence to prepare for the presence of her LORD.

On the whole, one should think that the soul's turning to GOD—our subject throughout these chapters—is not greatly affected by the date of the future Judgment. The Church prepares with the same diligence, whatever the "changes and chances" to be experienced before CHRIST comes—however great the strain of endurance required by S. James' exhortation, "Be patient until the coming of the LORD." It is useless to think of the unfolding ages. Even if we had not those vivid pictures which enable us, so to speak, to leap over the immense gulf and to surround ourselves with the majesty of the incomparable scene, we should still confess that it was coming. But in no case could we "know times or seasons." Nor is it the intervening space that matters, but the abiding fact of the Judgment, which must come eventually. Our LORD indeed draws from the hiddenness of the end a lesson of constant vigilance, and warns us that ill may befall those who watch not against His coming. But those lessons and warnings have a nearer application which is far more practical and tangible. The most wisely watchful against the day of doom must

always be he who watches for the hour of his own departure. When we reflect that we may die at any moment, and that between death and judgment can be no change of condition by repentance, we have said to ourselves what may well serve as goads¹ to the most sluggish and indifferent.²

But the points upon which penitence fixes attention are those already mentioned: (1) that CHRIST (whether He comes "at even, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning") will be the one Almighty and Supreme Judge; (2) that the account, therefore, will extend to the whole of our nature, which He took and redeemed for Himself;³ and (3) that we shall be judged in respect of our duty towards other members of His Body, the Church. In some degree, the same test will be extended to the nations of the heathen; and we, too, shall know that we were responsible for those outside the fold. But for us, at least, it will not be enough to have "done justly and loved mercy"⁴ as every man must. Much more than the mere kindness which men term "humane" will be expected of Catholic Christians who would hear "that most joyful voice,⁵ 'Come, ye blessed of My FATHER: for . . . inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye did it unto Me.'"

III. Let us proceed, then, to consider our meeting with JESUS CHRIST. At "that day and hour," we shall rise to a conviction, suddenly formed but most firm and clear, "that the SON of GOD *is come*, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true" (*ἀληθινόν*).⁶ He impersonates the truth of human nature. As once He stood before an earthly judge, and was condemned as a false pretender to

¹ "The words of the wise are as goads"—Eccles. xii. 11.

² See Eccles. v. 4-8: on which S. Augustine comments (*Tract. xxxiii. in S. Joann.*), "Propter illos qui dilationibus illuduntur, fecit diem mortis incertum."

³ S. Irenæus, in a well-known passage, (iv. 5) argues that our bodies have the hope of resurrection to eternity, because they participate of CHRIST's risen Body in the Eucharist.

⁴ Micah vi. 8.

⁵ See the Prayer for the Church in the English Mass of the 1549 Prayer Book.

⁶ 1 S. John v. 20.

royalty,¹ so now He is exalted King over all by an undisputed claim. "The zeal of the LORD of hosts" has at last performed what the humility and patience of JESUS held in abeyance for so many ages. This is His full and final vindication. Instead of that "reproof, shame, and dishonour" to which His Holy Name was subjected while the world went on in its pride, every creature now owns the glory of the Son of Man. From every heart goes up acknowledgment of truth, justice, love, in each step that He took on the way of our redemption. From the Fall in Adam to His own holy Incarnation, from the Incarnation to His place at the Right Hand, whether they will or not, men adore Him now for what He did, what He suffered, what He was and is. They perceive what it cost Him to plunge into the bitter conflict with Satan, they see the wounds of His Passion,² they are filled with the consciousness of His endurance of temptation. They know that He faced every form of evil that has come to them: they behold the result in this supreme triumph of His sinless humanity.

Now, too, they realise as none could till He appeared in glory, how His whole purpose was to win them to Himself. As surely as every eye in the ranks of the assembled Church is fixed upon the Throne where He sits, does His own eye rest upon the great concourse, appropriating them, claiming them for His inheritance.

So must "every tongue confess that JESUS CHRIST is LORD." That "glory of the FATHER in which He comes with holy angels" can be nothing less than the proclamation of Him as Head and Heir of all things. Once more the angels of GOD worship at His coming. Once more the Eternal FATHER owns His pleasure in His Beloved SON. But now, as never before, there is absence of all contradiction. Not a mouth is opened to blaspheme through the whole range of creation. This silent homage round the Throne of Judgment is as eloquent as the

¹ It is a favourite thought with S. Augustine (to be met with also in Bishops Pearson and A. P. Forbes' *Treatises on the Creeds*), that He who shall judge all mankind is the same who stood before the tribunal of a Roman procurator, and was condemned by him.

² Rev. i. 7.

"great voice in heaven," where "thousands of thousands" sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honour, and glory, and blessing." *Rex civitatis suæ, Victor super omnia.*¹

IV. By the revelation of Himself then made, our Master will execute judgment. The awakened intellect of mankind will apprehend the human perfection of JESUS CHRIST: will understand at last what it owes to Him. "Every eye shall see Him." Whatever we know about ourselves will be by comparison with Him.² This is really how He judges; not by interrogation in words, but by manifestation of that which every man was meant to be, but JESUS, alone, is—the "image and glory of GOD." We shall remember then how it was written, "Leaving an example, that ye should follow His steps, who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth."

Here is, probably, the explanation of that overwhelming awe, or terror, to which prophets and apostles alike give utterance, in view of "the Great Day of the LORD." It is not for the mysterious doom which may follow after: into that we cannot look, and allusions to it are comparatively rare. But the awfulness lies in the comparison of our own lives with His, when we are presented before His Face. "Who shall stand when He appeareth?" We should observe that an exact comparison is really what will take place. The fear that belongs to that Day will not be as of those sinking into illimitable depths, whither, they know not. On the contrary, men will almost be able to measure the cause of their alarm. It will proceed from a clear and definite presentation of human nature—their own flesh and blood—which will confront them. All that visionary pageant that we read of may be a mere accumulation of metaphor—the clouds, the trumpet, the dazzling throne, the faces innumerable set side by side.³ What cannot be metaphorical is the full manifestation of JESUS CHRIST, as He was and is.

¹ S. Aug. (*Enarr. in Ps. lxi. c. 6*).

² This will really be the συλλογισμὸς ἀμαρτημάτων, described in Wisd. iv. 20.

³ As S. Hilary says (*De Trin. i. 19*), "Comparatio terrenorum ad Deum nulla est: sed infirmitas nostræ intelligentiæ cogit species quasdam ex inferioribus, tanquam superiorum indices, quærere." The point is, that

V. Our Blessed LORD, by His Incarnation, took to Himself the soul of man, for redemption and salvation. Therefore the account to be rendered extends to each soul of ours, in every faculty. We have to answer for thoughts, words, and deeds, in which the whole activity of our will consists. Our deeds:—"We must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of CHRIST, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Our words:—"For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Our thoughts:—"He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts." But our LORD also took to Himself the human body; for "the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us." Our bodies, therefore, are to be raised and united to our souls at His coming, that we may "receive the things done in the body." Not that our bodies in themselves are responsible, or deserving of reward or punishment;¹ but inasmuch as reason and will have made the body their instrument in this time of trial, so hereafter through the bodily senses will joy or grief be made the everlasting portion of souls, whether taken up into glory or consigned to eternal death. And the justice of this will appear from the presence of the enthroned Judge, in whom the scars of His sacred Passion will bear witness to the share that His true human Flesh has had in the obedience "even unto death" of the well-beloved, only-begotten SON.

these figures must be believed *nearest* to reality, of any that our minds could at present conceive; although, if they could be compared with what "the Day shall declare," the proportion would be slight indeed. The mass of the sun is hidden from us by encircling fires; yet those fires, by their light and heat, teach us where to look for our sidereal centre. As Mr. W. R. Inge says, "We do not commit ourselves to the belief that there will some day be a great Assize;" that is no part of necessary Christian faith. But should we be very wise if we rejected the only direction given to our fancy, which comes from the lips of the Great Judge Himself? These details, like the *τύπος* shown to Moses in the mount, are given for a *παραβολή εἰς τὸν καιρὸν τὸν ἐνεστηκότα* (*Heb. ix. 9*).

¹ On Eccles. v. 6, "Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin," Delitzsch says we should rather translate "to bring thy body into *punishment*;" because what sins is not the flesh, but the will determined by the fleshly lust (*σὰρξ ἀμαρτίας*, *Rom. viii. 3*).

VI. It is possible that there may be another intention in bringing bodies, as well as souls, to that final manifestation, namely, that we may see and know each other as we never could before. Perhaps there is no need to perplex oneself with questions as to the degree of identity between the new body and the old, nor as to any outward difference between the "sheep" and the "goats." The obvious reflection is that any classification which is to take place of mankind "according to their works" will be more intelligible to us if we see the faces as they were once; when, even on earth, we used to learn so much from studying their expression. Now, however, we are to see them in a new light. The revelation of human character in those about us will be only less wonderful than the revelation of our LORD Himself. Familiar traits will have been lost; instances of conduct will rise up on every side, of which the quality had been determined by the verdict of ages past, which are now proclaimed to have no such value as was then supposed. Much that had seemed noblest and best-intentioned of men's actions will be consumed as by fire. Some again will be found very precious and CHRIST-like, but never exactly what had been expected while the earthly strife went on. Special attention is called by sacred writers to the amazement that many will feel, when persons once their companions and peers are set on a different level from that which they had held in the estimation of the world. "Then shall the righteous man stand in great boldness before the face of them that afflicted him, and make his labours of no account. When they see it, they shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the marvel of GOD'S salvation." And the estimation in which saints are to be held at last is of the utmost practical importance to the whole Church. For these are placed on the right hand of the Judge, and are His assessors in the judgment; in other words, our lives are brought into comparison with theirs, next to CHRIST'S own. It has been said that the witness of their obedience to CHRIST will be, for His Church, *quasi quædam canonum decreta*.^{*} So that, even by

^{*} Richard of S. Victor, quoted by S. Thom. Aqu. (*Suppl.* qu. xxxvii. art. i.).

this test, the discovery of one's own allotted place may be felt as strange and humiliating. Or again, whether saints or not, our fellow-creatures standing round will remind us of the general obligation to show mercy to all CHRIST'S members. In some, perhaps, will be visible traces of pain, that we might have relieved; in others, evidence of present exuberant joy, which we cannot enter into now, because we thought scorn to do so when we were their neighbours here below. How few have cared to notice that gallant struggle of the poor to be cheerful under manifold hardships! Yet the LORD heard them and delivered them out of their troubles; and now their place of honour is far higher than our own. And there, too, shall we missionaries be confronted with the heathen we were sent to save. Will they come forward to embrace us? Will they be set below us, or above? These are some of the thoughts that come crowding into our minds when we picture that immense assemblage, before the Judgment-seat, of the bodies and souls of our brethren. O the boundless sphere of Christian duty! What, in justice, ought one not to have done, having that "royal law" to fulfil, "Love one another, as I have loved you?"

"Præsto sunt et cogitatus, verba, cursus, opera,
Et præ oculis nolentis glomerantur omnia;
Illuc tendat, huc se vertat, coram videt posita.¹

VII. How will all this be known? How shall we have knowledge of CHRIST our Judge, of His saints, of our companions (friends, enemies, sheep we had to tend) and of our own deceitful hearts? The general belief is, that every individual will then, "in the twinkling of an eye," be endued with faculties by which both to apprehend the presence of CHRIST, and at the same moment, through the light of that great Epiphany, to read the whole of human history—his own, or that of others.² Thus quickly will be revealed the earthly course from first to last: desires of the heart will be made plain

¹ From a hymn by Cardinal Pietro Damiani, in Archbishop Trench's Collection of Sacred Latin Poetry.

² This is S. Augustine's teaching (*De Civ. Dei*, xx. 14): "Quædam vis est intelligenda divina, qua fiet ut cuique opera sua vel bona vel mala

as well as words and actions, and the true relations of human conduct, from one to another and from all to GOD, will be adjusted once and for ever. To the conscience of each will this be shown, and conscience will fix for itself the result, good or evil. There, too will sentence be pronounced,¹ under imperative direction from Him who sits on the Throne, but with no inward resistance on the part of him who receives it. "Their own thoughts one with another will be accusing or else excusing them, in the day when GOD shall judge the secrets of men's hearts." Those who are guilty will scarcely need to hear Him say, "Depart from Me." They will resemble that leprous king once at Jerusalem, who "himself hastened to go out" from the Temple of the LORD, "because the LORD had smitten him."²

VIII. Yet, whatever discoveries may await us at the last Day, it cannot be that they will reverse the judgment of self, or the estimate of duty to GOD and man, formed by humble souls in this life under guidance of the HOLY SPIRIT. If that were so, penitence would die. The contemplation of that terrible awakening of a long-blinded conscience would be enough to quench it in black despair. Whereas, in reality, our faith in the judgment to come should be stimulating to repentance. As was said at the beginning of this chapter, it should be the pre-eminent motive. The expectation of that strict account does indeed forbid any trifling with the righteous anger

cuncta in memoriam revocentur, et mentis intuitu mira celeritate cernantur." (These words are quoted by S. Thomas.) Pusey says, referring to 1 Cor. iii. 13, "Each deed will be shown to us, one after the other, each *burning in* more deeply the lesson of the other." (Sermon, *Losses of the saved*.) The same view is adopted by Dr. Mason (*Faith of the Gospel*, p. 379.)

¹ See S. Thomas Aqu. (*Summa* P. iii., *Suppl.* qu. xc. art. ii.).

² 2 Chron. xxvi. 20. And S. Chrysostom says (*Hom. v. in Rom.*), εἰ τις αἰσθησὶν ἔχει καὶ νοῦν, ἤδη καὶ τὴν γέενναν ὑπέμεινεν, ὅταν ἐξ ὀψέως γένηται τοῦ Θεοῦ. Compare the well-known lines from Ken's *Morning Hymn*:—

"Heaven is, dear LORD, where'er Thou art,
O, never then from me depart:
For to my soul, 'tis hell to be
But for one moment void of Thee."

To be "void of CHRIST" is, perhaps, the truest realisation of Hell that is possible to us here.

of GOD. We may even appeal to it as our last and strongest argument against that light-hearted optimism, the vanity of which we have tried to expose in these pages. But when that has been done, shall we not proceed to the resources at our disposal, for meeting this awful Judge?

We must not, indeed, allow ourselves in an opposite extreme; as if the last Judgment could make no difference to pious Catholics—to those, for instance, who have used sacramental confession for many years. Between the feeble and erring guide who discharges CHRIST'S priesthood upon earth, and the supreme Arbiter Himself, bearing the keys of death and Hades, the difference, alike in power and in discernment, is unspeakable. Before His eyes, with whom we "have to do" at the end, "all things are naked and laid open." And although S. Paul thought principally of consoling the persecuted, when he told how CHRIST, at His coming, would "both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the hearts,"¹ there is awful warning too, such as we cannot but heed, in his contrast between *that* and anything that happens here, in "the day of men." In short, the mention of the Judgment is meant above all things to spur us on to greater diligence in the use of self-examination. For truly, self-examination is the serious act of one ascending an indispensable tribunal; which is, moreover, the only tribunal from which one is permitted to pronounce sentence on an immortal soul. Forbidden as we are to judge others, we are equally forbidden not to test narrowly our own consciences, whether they be "void of offence toward GOD and man." With growth of experience comes increase of obligation. To every earnest-minded man the constant thought is, like S. Paul's, "I am a debtor." Year by year the field is enlarged: at what point can he dare to pause in his efforts? These which present themselves, are they not merely opportunities by neglecting which he would offend both GOD and man—for having neglected

¹ So S. Chrysostom (on S. Matt. x. 26) asks, "Are you grieved because men take you for deceivers? Wait a little, and then—σωτήρας ὑμῶν καὶ εὐεργέτας τῆς οἰκουμένης προσερούσιν ἅπαντες. And S. Jerome, on the same passage, writes, "Nolite timere; . . . quia veniet dies iudicii, in quo et vestra virtus et eorum nequitia demonstrabitur."

which, he would be punished in the sight of GOD, his brethren, and the holy angels, at the last Day?

Thus, here especially, to be strict in self-examination is a great and obvious lesson. S. Basil says that "he, who sets that day and hour before his eyes, and continually reflects on the account he must render before that inexorable tribunal, will either sin not at all, or only in a slight degree."¹ And S. Augustine speaks of this very earnestly, at considerable length:—

"In the penitence for greater sins, each person ought to use greater severity with himself; that so, being judged of self, he may not be judged of the LORD. So, if he fears to be 'manifested before the Judgment-seat of CHRIST,' where 'each one will receive the things done in the body, whether good or bad,' let him now ascend the tribunal of his own mind against himself; let him set himself against himself. For GOD threatens the sinner, saying, 'I will reprove thee, and set before thee the things that thou hast done.' Thus, let judgment be ordered in thine own heart also: let memory prosecute, conscience give evidence, and fear chastise thee to confession.² Finally, let sentence be uttered, that such an one judges himself unworthy to receive the LORD'S Body and Blood. Thus, he who is afraid of being separated from the Kingdom of Heaven by the last sentence of the supreme Judge, will now be separated by the Church's discipline from the Sacrament of the Bread of Heaven. Let him keep before his eyes the image of judgment to come. When others go up to GOD'S altar, and he does not, he will think how terrible is the doom by which some are hurled into everlasting death, though others are receiving life eternal. The wicked indeed may approach this altar; but [if they do] they, 'after their hardness and impenitent heart, treasure up for themselves wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of GOD who will render to every man according to his works.' And how shall any have boldness to desire GOD to turn away His Face from his sins, if

¹ See S. Basil (*Ep.* clxxiv. *Ad viduam*).

² S. Augustine says in the same way in another place (*Enarr. in Ps. xlix. cap. xxviii.*): "Torqueat te timor, erumpat confessio."

he does not say now, with his whole heart, 'I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me?'"¹

Yet, under this strict discipline, and in dread of the all-seeing Eye, the penitent sinner already judges himself by the same light that will be granted hereafter. The Confirmation-gift has not lost its efficacy here, nor will its strength be exhausted when the new life begins. A Christian's "continual help" never ceases to be in that only "Spirit of truth" who touched his heart at the hour of his first conversion. If here, in this present trial, he is taught of GOD in the ways of fear and love, that holy fear will embolden his approach to the Divine Judge,² and that "most excellent gift of charity" will be his passport to the better country, where all his brethren wait for him, at the last great gathering. Thus the scrutiny of self, slight and imperfect though it must be under present conditions—for no strictness of endeavour really compensates for dimness of vision—does establish each "honest and good heart" in the hope that he may live and die in GOD'S peace. Whatever he may know now, of his true state before GOD, he both prays to know, and accepts humbly and firmly. But it is certain that he cannot know all, while this "night" continues, and until that "Day breaks, and the shadows flee away."

Our King cometh. Let us then, as S. Chrysostom would have us, "come first before His Face with confession."³ And S. Ambrose, "Prevent thine accuser: if thou accuse thyself, thou shalt have none other accuser to fear."⁴ But Bishop Ken proceeds farther with his consolation:—"Though their love in this life is always imperfect, how can they despond, when they shall have love for their Judge—love that hath felt and will compassionate all their infirmities?"⁵ "GOD is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." He will not condemn His children because they attained not to the love "which passeth knowledge."

¹ See S. Aug. (Serm. cccli. 7).

² Compare Heb. x. 19-23.

³ See S. Chrysostom (Hom. xxiii. in 1 Cor.) :—προφθάσωμεν τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐξομολογήσει, ἵνα μὴ ἀπελθόντες ἐντεῦθεν ἀναπολόγητοι, τὴν ἐσχάτην ὑπομείνωμεν τιμωρίαν.

⁴ See S. Ambrose (*De Pœnit.* II. vii.).

⁵ See Bishop Ken's *Practice of Divine Love*, part. II.

IX. *In Te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in æternum.* There may be even "boldness in the Day of Judgment" for repenting sinners. The "appearing of the glory of our great GOD and Saviour JESUS CHRIST" was to S. Paul a "blessed hope," to be looked for with all sober earnestness. Our Judge was for our sakes truly made Man. He was born of a human Mother. He refused not our joys, He bare our griefs and sorrows. Yet in two things His manhood stands up before us sole, unapproachable, terribly remote:—

The first difference is entire and beyond all reckoning: He alone is wholly free from sin. Thank GOD! it is no absolute barrier to Christian penitents. Even before *that* presence, where "the sun shineth in his strength," penitence finds a lowly footing which is secure. He whose confidence is in "the Blood which cleanseth from all sin," walks in the light as JESUS CHRIST is in the light. The difference between him and his LORD is then as if it existed no longer. This, the soul's first plea at its conversion, will also be its last plea at the Judgment; but none other can be accepted.

"Rex tremendæ majestatis,
Qui salvandos salvas gratis,
Salva me, fons pietatis.
Recordare, Jesu pie,
Quod sum causa tuæ viæ,
Ne me perdas illa die."

The second difference is of degree only. Each one of us has received grace which sanctifies, but to Him the HOLY SPIRIT was given "without measure." What the fruit of this plenary indwelling was we trace, albeit dimly, from time to time. His speech was human, yet "never man spake like this man." His prayers were human, but He would pass whole nights in prayer to His FATHER. His fasting was human, but for our sake He fasted forty days and forty nights. His grief was human, His love was human; but His grief was agony, and His love embraced a whole sinful world. This is not like the first difference. Yet at how enormous a distance even this places us, from Him whom "the FATHER sanctified and sent into the world!" Alas! we talk of great men and

noble, we build their monuments, we spread abroad their fame. Shall we speak of them any more *then*, standing opposite to those wounds—that glory out of deep dishonour? What shall we ever have known till then, of what it meant, and what it cost, to say, “Lo! I come to do Thy will, O GOD?”

But now, when comparison has thus been truly made, so far as we could make it, are not His consoling angels near to “set us on our knees,” indeed, and yet to place us where we can look up and receive comfort? CHRIST’S redeemed are the sheep whom He “leads forth:” their faces are set the same way as His, and they are not out of hearing of His voice. It is no paradox, that the very consciousness of being so far behind sends them more eagerly forward. Hardly hoping or expecting to abridge the distance, they still press on, because it is their Beloved who calls them. There can be no sort of reckoning of gain by progress. We may try to do some of the same works that He did; we cannot dare to guess how far our intention and “manner of spirit” fall short of His. Perhaps those are often nearest who scarcely think of themselves as gaining ground at all.

Why speculate on such matters? Why concern oneself with doubts and guesses? What is certain is, that, for faithful servants treading in His steps, CHRIST has a welcome—however feeble may have been their imitation, however immense the interval between them and Himself. His rewards are not measured by their desert, but by the abundance of a Redeemer’s love. And they will receive what He has to bestow, in full measure, at the last Judgment. “After a long time the LORD of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them. And he that had received the five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, LORD, Thou deliveredst unto me five talents; lo, I have gained other five talents. His LORD said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy LORD.” When JESUS comes, some of His servants will be “seated” by Him “on thrones, judging;”^{*} or, as we read

* The words in S. Matt. xix. 27, 28, have sometimes been understood as limited to those who make themselves poor for CHRIST’S sake. See,

again, "made to sit down with Him in His Throne." Not *they*, indeed, are thus promoted, but rather CHRIST in them; for they have begun to realise that fervent wish of the apostle, "that CHRIST may dwell in your heart by faith." While sinners, unable to bear the victory of the Crucified, are driven forth with confounded gaze into the darkness of an eternal separation, these happy ones are more than reassured by the sight of Him whom they have served and loved so long. Something is there that answers to the earnest desires of their hearts, and labours of many years. Something that strangely revives memories of the Blessed Sacrament, and the "burnt-offering" of a surrendered will; something that tells of what was once weak and in small part, taken now into the glory of the eternal world; of conditional acceptance exchanged for a completed union between the Saviour and the saved. "FATHER, I will that where I am, they also may be with Me, that they may behold My glory which Thou hast given Me."¹

We know, too, that, in the union of the Master with His disciples, is comprised the union of Christian penitents one with another. They who encountered the same temptations and bore the same burdens, for the most part "mourning apart" though aided by the combined intercessions of the faithful, will now understand, through unreserved mutual confidence, that "the warfare" of each and all is most surely "accomplished." Therefore was it announced to S. John that, in the coming glory, GOD should "wipe away every tear from His people's eyes." The end of the short purgatory of repentance is to enter the ranks of a Church whose triumph is begun, and to reign with CHRIST for ever. For "whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted."

for instance, S. Augustine (*Enarr. in Ps. xlix. cap. viii. 9*): S. Thomas Aqu. (*Suppl. qu. xci. art. 2*). But probably our LORD's promise would extend to all who have practised heroic self-denial; not excluding those whose abnegation of self was made in earnest reparation for years—perhaps many years—wasted in sin.

¹ In a sense, the saints even contribute and add to the glory of their LORD. As S. Leo says, "Non potest nisi gloria esse Christi cujuslibet meritum Christiani."

CONCLUSION.

I AM unwilling to let these pages pass out of my hands without an expression of very honest regret for many omissions. Chiefly, for the slight mention of that which is the supreme source of hope to a Church and nation that have sinned like ours—the Precious Blood of CHRIST. It is true that one's subject had to be limited by careful restriction ; and where the desire was to treat of "the use," or practice, "of Penitence," words of fervent exhortation might have appeared somewhat out of place. The author was at liberty to quote primitive saints recommending a certain path to be followed, but would scarcely have been justified in assuming that his readers had not begun for themselves, with that "foundation other than which can no man lay, which is JESUS CHRIST."

And yet, with the sense of sin waning on every side, what could be done well, unless by quoting the one saving Name? Of what avail are inferior arguments? What good have they ever effected? To show how contrite spirits may make a truthful confession, to lay down prudent rules of living, to disarm prejudice—alas! how completely useless is all this, unless there has first been willing response to the Voice that bids, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest!" But, for all our heedless indifference, the great cause is not lost, while the virtue of CHRIST'S Atonement lives on. Presented to the observation of men, nay, to their boldest criticism from the first day onward ; rising victorious from the contempt of the scornful, and from bitter conflict with the most daring heresies ; the Atonement is still fresh, striking, and eloquent, still invincible in its truth, still profoundly moving by its tenderness. "He loved me, and gave Himself up for me." "And in none

other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved."

That is what I should have said. I am not blaming myself for absolute silence; but I ought to have said what I did say, a hundred times oftener. I ought to have trusted my readers with this simple thought, comprising, in itself, the whole compass of an eternal Pity embracing a guilty world:—"When we were yet sinners, CHRIST died for us." Let my own confession stand by the side of those (if any) that have been elicited by the reasoning in former chapters.

O CRUX, AVE, SPES UNICA! In the Cross resides the only hope "of all the ends of the earth;" and the only hope for the people of England. From age to age, GOD'S predestined souls make that discovery, and turn to look on the dying Face of One whom they can always trust—to whose compassionate Heart there is ever ready access. As they look, the idols that they have worshipped crumble into dust; the hard self-complacency of long years is broken by the healthful wound of sincere compunction. Sometimes a whole generation passes, and makes no sign: the world would seem to have utterly banished the Crucified. "GOD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand." All that appeared was the mere self-satisfaction of a dominant race, a pride little better than the old essential paganism. But then, perhaps with hardly a sign of expectation, and no word of prophecy going before, there came a beginning of return to the old child-like faith. Who can say what caused it? "The SPIRIT bloweth where He listeth." But we "hear the sound thereof."

When this book was begun two years ago, a wave of secularity was smoothly swelling, till it threatened to engulf the whole spiritual life of our people. At the present moment, though society still wears for the most part the same false face, some of us have begun to know ourselves far more truly and justly. There is no longer the same wholesale reticence concerning sin. Conversion is once more preached. Earnest people are pointing the way to truth and peace, only to be won

at the foot of JESUS' Cross. And many are striving to follow that leading. Perhaps they go, at first, because they are tired of frivolity; perhaps, because sorrow and bereavement have come to their house. And then, perhaps, they blame the dear Saviour, because He has not spared them this heart-ache so well deserved. Yet they are looking to where He is; and He waits for them to come. Presently they will seek Him with all the strength of soul that is still theirs. Sin has not wasted all: they will yet be spared to offer the contrite heart; and whenever they do, it will be the sure sign that they have found their Saviour.

Shall we, then, urge them to go to confession as the Church directs? Nay, leave them where they are, at His Feet. His Wounds will teach the rest of their lesson.

“ Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious Blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed Church of God
Be saved, to sin no more.”

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